

# WORLDS APART



ARTICLES  
AND  
STORIES  
by

## JENNY ELSON

a *STAR TREK*  
fanzine

WORLDS APART  
A study of Earth and Vulcan in fiction and article  
by  
JENNY ELSON  
cover  
by

"Two shall be born a galaxy apart  
And meet, to read life's meaning  
in each others eyes." (Anon.)

Editor - Sheila Clark  
Assistant editor - Valerie Piacentini  
Typing - Valerie Piacentini  
Proofreading - Sheila Clark  
Printing - Janet Quarton & James T.  
Collating - Sheila's chain gang!

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## THE PLANET OF VULCAN.

Vulcan is a class M planet, the home-world of one of the most advanced races within the United Federation of Planets. It has no moon, and its sun is young, bright and hot. Consequently, a great proportion of the planet is covered by desert. The atmosphere is thin, and temperatures high, the mean average being 140° F., although this drops appreciably at night.

There are two vast major continents, divided by a huge, tideless, sodium-free ocean. The ocean provides much of the water required by the inhabitants, as there is little surface water upon the land-masses themselves. Vast hydro-systems harness the water from the ocean to provide most of what is required for industry, farming and domestic use.

The two major continental land-masses are called, simply, North Continent and South Continent. (Kan-u-Ma and Lan-u-Ma.) There are also many islands, some large and densely populated, although the offshore islands surrounding both continents are mainly uninhabited. The largest of the offshore islands around Kan-u-Ma is Kan-Merh, (North Island) and it is here that Vulcan's highest government body sits in congress.

The climate varies little, except for the temperate zones at each pole. These two zones are very fertile, and yield the majority of Vulcanian food requirements, the farming being on a vast scale in plains which encircle the planet at both poles. On both continents, desert crops of cacti-like fruit and berries are also intensively farmed, and large oases within the deserts provide fruit and grain.

Both continents have formidable mountain ranges which, in ancient times, formed barriers between sea and land, thus keeping invaders out and inhabitants in. Excellent roads have now been forged through both these ranges, giving access to sea lanes, water supplies, and abundant sea food. (Not fish, which the Vulcans do not eat, but plankton, and other edible plant-life.) Although not a sea-faring people, the Vulcans have exploited their ocean to the best advantage, and use it intelligently.

The mountains themselves are rich in minerals which are mined in vast quantities. Apart from the mining settlements, however, the mountainous regions are largely uninhabited, although there is ample evidence on both continents of large fortified cities, all of them in ruinous state, and dating back to pre-logic times.

There are three distinct races on Vulcan, although all inhabitants have characteristics in common; they are of humanoid appearance, have delicately pointed ears, and a greenish complexion, the main component of their blood being copper, not iron.

Kan-u-Madi are the Vulcan types most familiar to Terrans. They are tall, slender and dark-haired. Lan-u-Madi have darker, greener skin, and their hair-colouring can vary from black to light brown. It also tends to be curly. Dan-u-Di, the islanders, are shorter, stockier and have great strength. Their skin is pale, and their hair light in colour. All three races speak a common language with local dialects and variations. This is known as "Common Vulcan Language." For all ceremonial purposes, High Vulcanian is used... an ancient and difficult language which is not now taught much in schools.

The majority of cities are inland, protected by the

mountain ranges. Shikhar is the major city of Kan-u-Ma, and Balhar of Lan-u-Ma, both cities being the ancient seats of government for their respective continents. Every city on Vulcan is built to a definite plan, and in logical order. Industrial areas are kept separated from residential zones, often by magnificent parks. There is just one major roadway for traffic, the whole city being bisected by pedestrian sidewalks which are cool and peaceful. All cities are constructed on a circular pattern, and they are surrounded by parks of great size and beauty which have the object of preventing the desert from encroaching on the metropolis.

Vulcan is an extremely wealthy planet, being entirely self-sufficient in food and raw materials. It is also a major exporter of minerals, foodstuffs and highly technical equipment required within the Federation. Unemployment is virtually nil, and all inhabitants enjoy a standard of living unequalled in the galaxy.

### VULCAN LIFE AND PHILOSOPHY.

The principal which guides all Vulcan life is Logic, which, it is said, inspires peace, honour, grace, beauty and courage. In essence, it is the possession of Good and Truth, and the creator of complete harmony.

Vulcan logic is not an inborn instinct, but is acquired by long and vigorous training. It is a discipline hard to follow and difficult to maintain, and it requires a great deal of self control and self denial.

### SELF DISCIPLINE.

Every Vulcan therefore regards self discipline as the foundation to logic, and strives to shape his character towards this goal. Without it, a logical life cannot be maintained, and the mind cannot escape from the degradation and savagery of within. Self discipline is the master of pleasures and desires. It rules out servitude of the body and mind, and imparts contentment and physical and mental fitness. This requires effort and application.

### TRAINING.

The need for and the attainment of self discipline is taught from an early age, and it is not until adulthood that any measure of success is achieved. This rigorous training is an onward going thing, and lasts throughout life. It includes abstinence of bodily requirements, a rigorous programme of physical exercise, and periods of intense meditation.

The correct training and education produces a keen desire for Peace, Harmony and Justice, and creates a total obedience to the laws of logic.

A child's character is formed in early years by a systematic regimen. Discipline, however, is never enforced high-handedly. Otherwise, the child would become rebellious and resentful. On the other hand, he is never spoilt, and never goes uncorrected.

There are four types of essential training. The academic skills, which stimulate the mind, music and dancing, which instil dignity, rhythm and beauty, physical training for fitness, strength, courage and honour, and the art of meditation and self-denial.

FAMILY LIFE.

Family life, therefore, is of supreme importance for the training of children. Both parents share equally in the responsibility, and it is considered that all the basic attributes of Vulcan life stem from the home environment. The greatest majority of homes induce a loving, peaceful, secure atmosphere which helps to mould the child's future.

VALUES.

Every activity in Vulcan life has an objective. There is always a target.(e.g., on a simplistic level, the objective of medical science is health.) It is thought the duty of every Vulcan to create opportunity... not only on a personal level, but for the good of all. The quality of life, however, depends heavily upon personal actions, and it is incumbent upon the individual to be aware of his actions and the reasons for doing them.(e.g., nourishment and physical training = strength, courage and honour.) An action only serves a purpose if it is logical, although two logical actions are not necessarily alike in purpose. An action logical for its particular goal can be illogical for an unintended purpose.(E.g., the building of a house to maintain family life is logical. If it was built and there was no family to maintain, then the purpose would be illogical.

QUALITIES.

The qualities required of a Vulcan are acquired by practice, instruction and care. There are many qualities, each having reference to separate functions, but they all have a common character in that they require logic, temperance, justice and dignity.

POSSESSION OF BEAUTY.

Logic is the possession of beauty within oneself, but the aim is not to possess it for selfish gratification, but to create a perpetuation of it for the good of all.

HARMONY

Therefore, logic is harmony, and there can be no harmony if there is discord and lack of logic within oneself. Here, the importance of music is best illustrated. Music produces harmony from factors which are first in discord. There is no accord between treble and bass notes. Similarly, there can be no agreement between discordant elements of life. But it is possible to harmonise the notes into a smoothly flowing rhythm. Thus, discord becomes concord, and is converted into harmonious rhythms of existence.

NOME & IDIC.

The concept of Nome and IDIC are basic to Vulcan life. Nome literally means "All" and demonstrates the idea that an infinite variety of things combine to make existence worthwhile. The IDIC concept is basically the same, and is the Terran name for the symbolic decoration worn by Vulcans. IDIC

means "Infinite diversity, infinite combinations." In fact, IDIC is the symbol of Nome. It is a circle and triangle of yellow metal in shiny and textured finish with a white jewel. The different shapes and textures represent the diverse things which come together to create truth and beauty.

The glory of creation lies in its infinite diversity and meanings. Therefore, all Vulcans place Nome at the centre of their thoughts and actions, for it cultivates physical and moral virtue and assists living with dignity and honour. It stirs into movement the rhythms of existence, guiding everything towards a logical and successful conclusion, which is to the greatest good of Vulcan kind.

#### ONE-NESS.

The Vulcan who pursues with vigour the way to logic and Nome begins at an early age to contemplate One-ness, and eventually discovers a personal relationship with it. When the full beauty of One-ness is realised, he is compelled to meditate upon it as it exists in all things. He will be strengthened by his knowledge, because he will be face-to-face with the full beauty and truth of knowledge.

The concept of One-ness is not exclusive to the Vulcan, and many life-forms acknowledge its existence in some form. The Vulcan word for it is "Janah," the nearest English equivalent being "Soul," although Vulcans deny the existence of the soul as such. In essence, it indicates the completeness of mind and body and is a most important possession which the individual respects most intimately.

#### FRIENDSHIP.

One-ness delves deeply into the concept of friendship, an important part of Vulcan ideology, and one which is frequently misunderstood by Terrans who have no real knowledge of it.

Friendship is of a highly personal nature, formed on a one-to-one basis. It is called Kahn Lawh, which, literally translated, means "Noble Existence." It is a friendship of two individuals to the near total exclusion of any other person. Its logical objective is to enhance all the necessary qualities of life, which are reciprocated in full, thus creating a perpetuation of them.

Much time is required to establish Kahn Lawh successfully, for it is a "Slow Ripening Fruit." It is considered to be a moral obligation which requires complete and undivided consciousness of both parties, for its objective is life and existence. It is therefore in the best interests of the couple that they are not influenced by emotion but by logic.

Such is the nature of Vulcan life that Kahn Lawh is, almost without exception, a partnership of the same gender.

#### EMOTIONS.

Extremes of emotion are to be avoided, for the individual must win the victory over himself. To fall victim to oneself is the worst thing that can be imagined, for it points to war within oneself. Each individual is conquered by or conqueror of himself. The self controlled and courageous will do this with ease, and with

experience the pain will lessen in intensity. The restrained life will discover Peace and Beauty, thus making the whole life a good existence.

This does not mean to say that Vulcans lack emotions. Emotive elements within the Vulcan nature are strong, to which their savage past will testify. It is for this reason that emotions are kept under strict control, although they are not denied existence. Anger, affection, appreciation, the love of beauty, the hatred of war etc. are all acceptable emotions providing that extreme is avoided, and that they have logical purpose.

#### PLEASURE/PAIN.

Pleasure and pain flow like two springs released by nature. The individual must draw the right amount from the right one at the right time in order to live a happy life.

#### LIFE

Life is a great value, and all value is worthy of possession. To take life would be to devalue life, and for this reason all Vulcans are vegan. However, value, it is argued by some, is relative to condition. Intelligence is upon a higher scale than instinct. Therefore, a Vulcan dying of hunger will sustain himself by eating the flesh of an animal in order to perpetuate intelligence. This happens only in the most dire of circumstances.

#### DEATH.

Death is not to be mourned, because the life which has preceded it has served its objective to its fullest potential. A death is always preceded by life, whether it be the birth of a new being, or the birth of new knowledge. Such is the eulogy for any Vulcan. The only death to be mourned is the unnecessary one, for the potential of life has not been fulfilled.

#### THE ARTS.

All forms of art are important facets to life, because they convey existence. There is much tranquility and beauty, particularly in paintings and sculpture, which tends to be fluid rather than stylised, and express the motion of life-lines rather than an actual object. Literature too, and poetry in particular, also stresses this theme. Much of Vulcan poetry, whilst in blank verse, is very beautiful and surprisingly emotive in content, conveying the rich, deep respect that Vulcans have for their life-style and planet. Dancing and music, on the other hand, is stylised. Dancing... almost exclusively a male preserve... is extremely symbolic, each step having its roots in antiquity, but it ably conveys the beauty of movement. Music is perhaps the most important part of the arts, for it teaches both rhythm and concord. There is no elaborate melody, and no frills and adornments. Rather, it exploits each individual note, cultivating physical and mental balance and adjustment.

#### THE POSITION OF WOMEN.

Vulcan females exist in a position of some ambiguity, partly relating to their biological role, partly to their historical position.

From very ancient times, Vulcan was a matriarchal society, a fact born of necessity, since their menfolk were always off to fight another war. It was the women who were left to look after the home, the city, the government of the planet and the day-to-day necessities of life. Many of them, in fact, became excellent



leaders of their society.

This was coupled by the incontrovertible fact... still in existence... that the female controls the male urge to mate, and therefore she holds the vital key between logic and madness. In basic terms, the female has control over the male to a large degree.

Perhaps this is the reason why the inconsistencies occur; that the males, being controlled like this, require some sort of leeway in other directions. It is hardly logical, and the Vulcan would be the first to agree that this facet of life is as illogical as Pon Farr itself. Some, disliking this illogical approach, argue that control breeds control; or, as a Terran would perhaps more precisely put it : "Serves you right!"

Females, therefore, still have a major role to play in public life... and some of them make an outstanding success of it too. Yet within the home, they are technically subservient to their husbands, and on completion of the marriage contract, they become the property of the male, with no rights to property or privilege. But it must be remembered that what is abhorrant to Terran society can be perfectly acceptable elsewhere.

In fact, the actuality is not as bad as it would seem. Within recent years, Vulcan, as elsewhere, has been influenced by other societies, and there is a gradual emergence of true equality of the sexes, although it is a slow process, particularly amongst the patrician families. Nowadays, women do have equality in the home, their rights to property being safeguarded by legal documents, although it remains Vulcan etiquette that they should appear to be subservient when in a public place. In all but family life, they are, in fact, the equal of males, and many females hold positions of great importance.

#### VULCAN HOMES.

Homes are usually modest places, where there is an atmosphere of peace, tranquillity and "Homeliness", since, it is said, "The home is the birthplace of the awakening to Nome." To reinforce this idea, all Vulcan homes have a garden, (known by Terrans as the IDIC garden), which is a place for serene contemplation.

#### THE CLAN SYSTEM.

Vulcan society is based upon the clan system, which has been modified from the savage past to form the major system of government upon the planet.

The modern system was evolved with total equality in mind, and written into the constitution, although historically, there are four of the twenty-two clans which have higher status than the others... a fact never exploited in politics. One such clan is Shm-Lrno-Fa, perhaps the most well known of all the Vulcan clans, of which the elder statesman is T'Pau. Many of the members of this, Vulcan's foremost clan, are renowned scientists, diplomats and politicians, all of whom are well respected by the United Federation of Planets.

From an early age, children are taught total loyalty to their clan, and come under its jurisdiction from birth. Education is a major policy... not formal education, which comes under the jurisdiction of the Vulcan state as a whole, but the teaching of history, rituals, ceremonies and customs appertaining to the particular clan.

There is full equality, and members of the clan become full voting members upon their official franchisement at the beginning of their second trimester, (i.e. 31 Vulcan years.) Such members elect delegates to the Clan Meet, (Shrm Lhr), the continental government, which deals with all local matters of policy and law. The Shrm



Lhr convenes at ShiKhar and BalKhar respectively, and is responsible for electing members to the Clan Council, (Shrm Lhrih) at Kan Merh. Shrm Lhrih is the system of higher government, dealing with all major policy. It also elects its representatives to UFP councils at Babel.

All ceremonial rites are marked by the wearing of the clan toga, which is also worn to honour guests and parents. The toga, "Shrm Trahi) is similar in appearance to a kimono and is, without exception, coloured white.

The clan symbol, traditionally embroidered by pre-pubescent females, is worked onto the breast in metallic substances. Each clan has its own symbol, usually a bird or animal of prey. Two broad, red stripes around the hem signify franchise, a white belt, adulthood, a green belt, childhood. The only other symbol to be worn on the shrm trahi is the "Lirpa" on the left sleeve, signifying that the male has passed L'Kinata... the ultimate test of manhood... with honour. Because of the nature of L'Kinata, few Vulcans are eligible to wear this prestigious symbol.

Some ceremonies known to Terrans as "Vulcan Rites" are, in fact, clan rituals, and these can vary from clan to clan, often to a major degree. Because Shrm-Lrno-Fa is by far the best known of Vulcan clans, its rituals will be discussed in some detail.

#### KAH-LAZH.

Kah-Lazh is an annual festival designed to stress the importance of co-ordination in music and dance. All children of five years take part in this festival, which is held in the central park of ShiKhar. The choreography is complicated, and each sequence has its roots in antiquity, depicting the birth and growth of life. Despite the fact that Kah-Lazh is a festival, it is a serious affair, designed to assist the young child towards co-ordination and mental control.

#### KAHS-WAN.

Kahs-Wan is a maturity test for young boys of seven Vulcan years, often misquoted as being the "Manhood Test." In fact, it is a test of the onward-going maturity of the youngster, and an indicator of his courage. It is a survival ordeal, in which the boy has to survive alone in the desert without food or water, save what can be found. To fail this test once is no disgrace to any boy.

#### BHRA-KAN.

For the parents to choose a wife for their son is a practice which, in general, is dying out, but for the patrician clan of Shrm-Lrno-Fa it remains an important parental privilege, since they do not wish to weaken the clan by intermarriage.

When the child is seven, and has passed the maturity test, a suitable mate is found for him from within the clan. The child is then taken to The Place of Bonding, (The Vale of Winds), a dust bowl in the desert six kilometers from ShiKhar, by the father. Witnesses are already present, usually the elder of the clan. Each child is introduced formally to the elder, who explains the nature of bonding.

The male and female child then touch each other's foreheads with their fingertips to establish a mind-link. It is the female who asserts herself at this stage, the male being fairly passive. The mind link, however, is a strenuous mental exercise for such young children, and it is usual for them to fall unconscious when the bonding is complete.

Technically, the couple are now married, but they will not

come together again until after male puberty, at which time, the female can induce a state of pon farr by means of the mind link.

The link can only be broken by the female, usually if the male is considered to be unsuitable in some way. The male has no control over the bond.

#### K'AIREH

The K'Aireh journey is undertaken by all children at ten years of age, and is one of the elementary steps towards the meaning of NOME. K'Aireh is a mountain valley, a menacing, ugly area, which fills the average ten year old with dread. At its centre is an evil-smelling, chemical laden lake, through which the child must swim towards the dangerously eddying centre. At some point the child dives into the depths, and eventually emerges into an underwater cavern of breathtaking beauty.

#### SHRM PARHN.

At the age of fifteen years, the child is officially welcomed into the clan. He/She is accompanied by both parents to the Clan Meeting House, where his name is inscribed onto the ancient tablets. He then addresses the Assembly, outlining his loyalty, honour and courage. This dates back to historical times, when the boy became a warrior at the age of fifteen. Now, it is a mere formality for children of both sexes.

#### KAH-WALH.

Undertaken at the age of twenty years, this is the Manhood Test proper. Again, the young man is sent into the desert without food or water for a full planet month. During this time he must meditate frequently upon his past and present life, in order to accumulate experience for his future. Sustenance is found within the desert. The young man must further test his courage by staking a wild animal and keeping it under control by means of a mind meld.

#### L'KINATA.

This is the ultimate test of manhood. Because of its fearsome nature, it is non-obligatory, and few males undertake it. To fail means certain death.

L'Kinata is undertaken in S'Renk, a huge chasm in the heart of the mountains. Here, the crust of the planet is in continual movement, and sulphuric streams gush out unpredictably over the tortured rock. Poisonous reptiles abound, often attacking on sight. Here, the individual must survive for one planet month. All he has to assist him is two litres of water and a lirpa.

At the end of the trial, and in the presence of two chosen witnesses, the young man circumcises himself with his lirpa, the wound being dressed with a poultice of tamil bark.

#### K'AH-ME-DAHL.

A pilgrimage to the family shrine must be undertaken once during every trimester and is mistakenly thought by Terrans to indicate ancestral worship.

This may have been true in antiquity, but it is now a period of intense meditation.

The family shrine is a simple, one-roomedcroft made of thatch. It is said that when a shrine is empty, it signifies death awaiting the rebirth of life. The pilgrim meditates there for many days, often to the point of exhaustion. It is a time of intense renewal.

Nhra Grhi means, quite simply, "The Re-Affirmation." It is a pilgrimage made to the places which have affected and influenced one's life, and all Vulcans are expected to make this pilgrimage at least once during their lifetime.

The pilgrim treads the pathways of his/her former life, in order to seek meaning of both present and future. Through meditation, fragmentation becomes whole, and life becomes One.

#### CLAN FESTIVALS, CONTESTS AND CHALLENGES.

There are many events in clan life which mark the passing of the year. These include music and dancing contests, which culminate in the All Vulcan Music Challenge, endurance tests, for both male and female competitors, traditional armed and unarmed combat contests, each with its own set of rules, and several sports meetings.

All these contests and festivals have their ancestry in pre-logic times, although they are now formal and stylised rather than bloody and brutal. It is thought to be good for both body and mind to engage in competition, for it enhances self-discipline and loyalty to the team.

#### MARRIAGE AND CHALLENGE.

Technically, marriage occurs during Bhra-kan, whether that be by parental choice when the couple are children, or at a later time when the couple are old enough to make the decision for themselves. The second half of that ceremony does not occur until the female first places the male into a state of pon farr by means of the mind link.

Koon-ut-kal-i-fee (The place of marriage and challenge) is an arena in the desert several kilometers away from ShiKhar. It is the traditional marriage place of the Shrm-Lrno-Fa. Inside the arena are the ruins of an ancient temple, and two large, jade-coloured wind-chimes.

The first to arrive at the temple is the male and his chosen friend. By now, the male is in an induced state of pon farr. Then main procession then arrives, consisting of the clan chief, borne on a litter by four males, the female, walking beside the litter, and several bell-pole bearers and marriage drummers. The immediate family of the couple are not present.

As the male strikes the wind chimes with a stone mallet, the clan elder alights from the litter to stand in the centre of the arena, whilst the female seats herself beneath an archway of the temple. The elder then pronounces an ancient blessing over the male.

If there is no challenge, the bride joins the groom, and the clan chief asks the bride if she is willing to become the wife of the chosen male, bearing in mind that she will be his property with no right or status of her own. Upon her agreement, the groom is asked if he is prepared to accept the bride as his property, to defend her, to ensure her physical needs are met, and to maintain her offspring. His agreement, followed by the shaking of the bell poles signifies that they are now married.

To the sound of the slow, rhythmic beat of the wedding drums, the procession returns to the city, the elder leading the way in the litter. Upon reaching ShiKhar, the couple go immediately to their home where the marriage is consummated.

The "Challenge" occurs when the bride decides that she prefers another male. She shouts "Kah-if-far!" to the assembly to signify this.

Immediately, the bearer of the Axe stands forward as a warning that he will act if there is a show of cowardice. The clan chief asks the girl to choose her champion. This is usually the male she prefers, who is not in a state of pon farr, and is thus physically stronger and more mentally alert.

Combat begins with the lirpa, a hefty, cudgel-like instrument which has a knife blade at one end. This first fight is the weakening process,

after which the lirpa is exchanged for the ahn-woon... two leather straps which serve as both sling and garrotte. This time, the fight is to the death, and continues until one of them is finally overcome and killed.

The marriage ceremony then recommences in the usual way, the dead Vulcan being removed after the marriage party has left the arena.

#### PON FARR.

Pon farr is the male cyclical sexual drive which, after puberty, can occur approximately at seven standard-year cycles. It is a process widely misunderstood by Terrans, possibly because the Vulcans themselves are always so reluctant to discuss it.

Puberty for the male begins between the ages of 20 - 30 planet years. Female puberty is earlier, generally 16 - 20 planet years, and she is fertile for just thirty days in every seven standard years at the time of her menstruation.

It is the female who controls pon farr by virtue of the bonding. It is a strength-sapping process and often occurs only after the first two or three of her cycles.

Powerful thoughtwaves, made strong by the female hormones, are linked to the centre of the male brain which controls sexual responses. This link is so powerful that vast distances can be overcome.

When contact is established, the male comes into a state of pon farr, and thus is completely under the control of the female mind link and his own powerful sexual hormones. These hormones quickly strip him of every civilizing influence, and he is in a continual state of aggression and agitation... in fact, a most dangerous animal. Nothing, apart from the urge to mate, is of importance to him, and it is literally a case of "Mate or die." The hormones he produces reach a toxic level in the bloodstream within days of pon farr being induced, and will invariably kill him if he does not mate. After mating, the female releases him from the mind-link, the hormones decrease rapidly, and he returns to his normal self within hours. The only other thing capable of releasing him is violence, when even stronger hormones combat those which induce sexual arousalment.

Contrary to widespread popular belief, Vulcans of both genders are capable of normal sexual activity at times other than the female's fertile period. Again, this fact is not widely known because of the Vulcan reluctance to talk about this subject.

#### CONTRACEPTION.

Pregnancy will invariably occur during pon farr unless contraception has been used. Vulcans have a long fertile life, the females being able to produce children up to the age of eighty Vulcan years, and so they are totally aware of the dangers of over-population. Thus, contraception is widely used, and it is invariably a female responsibility, since it is they who control pon farr. One child per family is considered to be the norm; two are acceptable, but three or more incur heavy tax penalties... a step considered logical in order to avoid disaster in what is a finely balanced ecological order.

#### OTHER SOCIETIES WITHIN VULCAN LIFE.

As in most societies, there are groups of separatists, non-conformists and malcontents within Vulcan society, and these are tolerated surprisingly well by the majority of people.

#### LAHN-TO-WAHLK.

By far the largest group of these are the aesthetic, monasterial-like Lahn-to-Wahlk, who live in isolated communities, usually in mountainous regions where access is difficult. They live in well guarded,

stone built forts, and have austere existence, scraping a living from the land and refusing aid of any kind. The communities are either all male or all female, who have no contact with each other. Their premise is that Vulcan ideologies have become weakened by contact with outworlders, and thus they seek a life of pure logic, uncontaminated by outside influences. The only contact the Lahn-to-Wahlk have with the outside world is when the occasional stranger seeks refuge and retreat in order to meditate.

#### BAN-HALKH.

Far more respected within the mainstream of Vulcan life are the Ban Halkh, the individualistic and distinctive wise men of the desert.

Ban-Halkh, too, live a frugal life, but they are not austere. In fact, they are said to be at One with nature, and they are always gentle, highly intelligent people who are always willing to impart their large stores of knowledge to others whilst offering help, advice and comfort in the process. They are, without exception, well respected by the Vulcan people as a whole.

Ban-Halkh live beyond the confines of urban areas, usually in desert regions, or on the occasional oasis. Many people visit them to gain help, reassurance or knowledge. Many Ban-Halkh do, on occasion, venture into the cities, an event which arouses much interest, with many people flocking to hear them speak on a wide variety of subjects.

They are also considered to be good healers, and are consulted by Vulcans both for personal and veterinary ailments. Unlike the Lahn-to-Wahlk they do not spurn outworld contact or modern innovations. In fact, they welcome both and consider that all things add to knowledge as a whole.

#### KANZAH.

It is true to say that the Kanzahi are the thorn in the flesh of Vulcan society, for these are the real "Drop-outs"... the malcontents, the ne'er-do-wells and the self-styled "Pre-logicians" who make for constant embarrassment..

Such, however, is the undivided loyalty of the Vulcan nation as a whole that the Kanzahi do little to disrupt daily life, and they are regarded with such complete abhorrence by the mainstream of society that few dare show their faces in areas of high-density population. Usually, they make their communities in isolated regions or islands. Many "Pre-logicians" emigrate to the planet of Ikanzania which they have colonised for several generations, and where they can revert to what they call "The True Vulcanian Order."

#### OUTWORLDERS.

To a large extent, outworlders have lost their curiosity value to the Vulcan race as they have gradually become more and more exposed to them. Terrans, especially, are able to live most agreeably on Vulcan and there are, in fact, several Terran communities on the planet, composed mainly of scientists. There are also two large starfleet bases, although these are, to a great extent, self-sufficient.

It is perhaps interesting to note that, although to the majority of Terrans, life on Vulcan appears to be austere and inhospitable, the resident Terran community are quick to discover that the reverse, in fact, is true. Vulcan is a richly rewarding and diversified society, filled with peace, beauty and harmony.

Despite the fact that Vulcans do accept outworlders into their community, there is still a great reluctance, particularly on the part of the more patrician traditionalists, to discuss with them their rites and traditions. Equally, there are very few mixed marriages, mainly because of biological and cultural differences which could be too

difficult to bridge. There have, however, been two or three Vulcan-Terran unions which have been successfully productive.

These unions tend to be viewed with suspicion for the most part, and the product of them... the half-breed children... are often lonely, confused and difficult individuals who lack identification with either of their parents' societies. Either they fail to be Vulcan at all... and in doing so, fail to be Terran too, or they become so intensely Vulcan that they find great difficulty in self-expression and friendship. Generally, it is thought that a mixed marriage is not a particularly good idea, and is not to be recommended.

### THE PLANET EARTH.

Many of the personnel aboard the USS Enterprise have been moulded by their mother planet, Earth. It is a world which encourages initiative, individuality and creativity. Personal freedom is highly prized, and non-conformists tolerated to a high degree. There is excellent health care and education, and sophisticated technology is a major part of every day life. For people prepared to work towards the goal of an ideal society there are abundant opportunities.

### FOUNDATIONS OF THE NEW ORDER.

The foundations of Terran society in the 22nd century A.D. were formed during the decade of the 1990's. During the early years of that decade, a group of scientists and genetisists announced to a startled world that they had produced a super-race of humans with the object of developing human-kind into a master race of genetically perfect people. Despite the instant and often violent protests world-wide, the supermen, with the aid of the scientists who had bred them, quickly took power and control over all the major governments of Earth. Then the inevitable happened, and they started on their campaign to systematically destroy all "inferior" people and races.

### EUGENICS WAR.

When the humanists recovered from the shock of such a devastating tyranny, they quickly re-grouped, and their revulsion at what was happening finally erupted into full-scale, global warfare. It was to be Earth's last war; a war which, ironically, united all races against the most evil and dangerous power of the supermen.

After a long and bitter struggle, the supermen and their allies were defeated. Many were killed, others were driven into deep space, leaving the rest of humanity to pick themselves up from the ashes of total war.

### THE NEW ORDER.

One radical and beneficial change came about as a direct result of the Eugenics War. During it, people of all races had fought side by side for the good of mankind as a whole, and in the euphoria of peace, this attitude remained. The humanist leaders of the day were quick to exploit this, and soon re-formed the United Nations, which successfully pioneered what came to be known as The New Order.

The new United Nations was as dynamic as the old one was ineffectual, and because of the prevailing mood of humanity, was far more able to exploit the good and cast out the bad with what amounted to almost total acceptance. Barriers, broken down during the war, were completely demolished, and the New Order was built upon a solid foundation of freedom, personal liberty, equality and opportunity for the whole of mankind. It was the beginning of a new, exciting era.

### NATIONAL BOUNDARIES.

All people must have basic roots, for that is an inborn instinct of mankind. To have pride and sense of purpose, the human race needs to associate itself with local ties rather than the world at large... a fact true even when individuals are light years away from their natural home. Thus, national boundaries loosely remain upon Earth, and national and ethnic pride is encouraged rather than discouraged. Many people prefer to remain within these boundaries, whilst enjoying the many benefits of the wider society as a whole.

To a large degree, each "State" governs itself with little interference from the United Nations which, as a whole, makes decisions only of major policy. People are completely free to choose where they reside, and within that boundary to choose their type of politics and policies, which range in style from the most conservative to the most flamboyant.

### RACIAL TOLERANCE.

A society such as this tends to be fluid. The greatest majority of people are well travelled and well educated, which means that they are far more aware of each other than were their ancestors. There is a genuine acceptance of each other, and a healthy respect and interest in cultural and ethnic differences.

### RELIGION.

Because of such a total belief in Mankind as a whole, religion is in general of secondary importance, and in many parts of the world virtually non-existent. The majority of people have outgrown the need for such doctrines, although there is a very vague, general belief in an Ultimate Creator.

The major religions are still represented, as are a variety of quasi-religious movements, many of which are colourful and have their origins in other galactic races. These are mainly supported by the young, and are philosophies rather than religious sects, with a preponderance towards idealism rather than allegiance to a particular godhead.

In general, however, there is a wide-spread apathy towards religion, despite a universal tolerance of it.

### THE CITY.

The basic unit of community life is the city which, together with its environs, provides for all the material requirements of the populace. They are well planned communities where environment is of paramount importance.

The greatest majority of cities are of vast, linear formation, which is greatly favoured by environmentalists. They extend lengthways for several hundred kilometers, but are usually no more than twenty kilometers in depth, the object being to preserve the environment and to place every one of the inhabitants as close as possible to the open countryside.

The cities are divided, for practical purposes, into sectors, each one being a self-contained community. Residential areas are carefully separated from industrial zones by parks and gardens which, due to a fine degree of weather control, flourish in every part of the Earth. Pollution control is exacting, and every industrial zone is responsible for environmental preservation. Within each sector there are medical and education facilities, and the citizens enjoy equally excellent facilities throughout the world.

### RURAL COMMUNITIES.

Communities away from the vast city complexes are much more basic. Housing and industrial units are built around central communal facilities (i.e. medical centre, school, stores etc.) in a circular formation. Each community is virtually autonomous, and the majority of them are



are farming communities. Some, however, house what is known as "The New Society", young people who, unlike the highly technological farmers, eke out a living in a genuine attempt to revert to their ancestry.

### "POSEIDON".

For generations, mankind has been able to live beneath the sea; first in atomic powered submarines, then small, independent units built onto the floor of the ocean and of interest only to the scientists. Further experimentation lagged far behind space technology. Global birth-rates declined, there was, at last, enough space upon the planet's surface for Earth's inhabitants, and "Sea-bed living" never captured the imagination.

During the early part of the century, however, two large experimental cities were built on the ocean bed, and the experiment was called "The Poseidon Project."

The popular name for the two cities is "Poseidon Follies", for they have been a failure, despite the many incentives given from time to time by the United Nations in an effort to populate the cities. Both cities remain grossly under-populated and grossly expensive to run at such a low rate of manpower. To the majority of people, the failure of Poseidon is obvious, and the project was doomed from the start. To people used to travelling through the vast distances of space, life in an undersea city would be far too restrictive.

### STARBASES.

There are six starbase cities on Earth, a necessity for such a widely travelled population. These cities are jump-off points to the entire galaxy, and are exciting, fast-moving places, especially to the young, who seem to be drawn to them like magnets. Starfleet Command and the merchant fleet have large bases at each of the six cities. In addition to the traffic they create, there are also a wide variety of trading vessels, colonisation ships and vacation starliners, both of Terran and alien origin.

Starbase cities, unlike the regular communities, are chaotic, brash, noisy and exciting. Inevitably, they are hotbeds for crime, prostitution and intergalactic smuggling on a huge scale. All too many people are lured by the subtle charm of these cities, only to discover too late that the net has been cast over them and they are being dragged downwards.

### HOUSING.

Homes tend to be functional rather than beautiful and, apart from local variations, fairly standard throughout the world. People tend not to own palatial buildings... although there is nothing to stop them... because gracious living on such a grand scale is, in general, frowned upon and thought to be anti-social.

Apartments are the rule rather than the exception, usually sited in two-storey blocks with access to park areas and open play-spaces for the children. Each apartment is designed for maximum comfort and efficiency, complete with solar heating and efficient air-conditioning. Each block is served by a centralised computer-store. To go shopping, the housewife merely presses out the correct sequence on her "Kitchen-Mate" and is thus supplied automatically with her groceries. Food is either pre-cooked, or takes very little time to prepare and serve. The preparation and consumption of food takes place in one room, which is called "the family room", where TEC (see communications) takes pride of place.

Thanks to modern farming techniques, food is in plentiful supply, although it tends to be unadventurous except in the starbase cities where the more exotic can be readily purchased... at a price.

Staple foodstuffs are relatively inexpensive, thanks to excellent weather control and the development of high-yield, disease-resistant crops. Tripletriticale wheats and decal yield soya flourish in most

climates. Krill is, along with soya, a major source of protein, and can be obtained in many different flavours and dressings. Krill, of which there is an over-abundance since the extinction of the whale, is fished in great quantities in the Antarctic seas. Meat and fresh vegetables are a rarity in the cities.

Because of the ease with which food is prepared, people tend not to eat out. There are very few restaurants, and of the existing ones, the majority are specialised, intergalactic-style places which are very expensive.

### CLOTHING.

Clothing is always made exclusively of synthetic fibre, which is recycled rather than washed. As always, it is the young who set the trends in fashion, and they often go for the more "way-out", intergalactic styles, which are quickly modified to suit everyone's taste. For everyday wear, styles are very casual, trousers and tunic tops being almost standard wear for both sexes.

### TRANSPORT / COMMUNICATION.

Because of the large distances involved, even within a single city, transport and communication are of paramount importance.

Since the majority of residential zones are pedestrianised, public transport is both cheap and highly efficient. The major way of personal communication is by swift underground and overhead monorail systems. Longer journeys are made in solar powered ground cars, which can be hired from strategic points within each city sector. For intercontinental travel, hypersonic airliners are used, whilst visits to Lunaport, or any of the near-distance colonies, are undertaken in atomic-battery powered space liners.

Video-phones are in use world-wide, and most people have one installed in their homes. Simple, push-button systems are enough to speak to and see anyone anywhere in the world. Short range communicators are also popular, but the long-range type are expensive and used exclusively by business men.

"Three-dimensional Entertainment Centre", known universally as TEC, is the main feature of almost every home. TEC is a sophisticated extension of the Coupled Charge Device, which was pioneered in the 20th century. One whole wall is given over to TEC, the picture being back projected. The picture is in three-dimensional colour and can be used purely for entertainment, or as a spectacular backdrop effect. Viewdata can also be programmed into TEC, giving a wide range of information and reading material.

### EDUCATION.

Education is highly prized, and within reach of anyone prepared to take the vast range of opportunities offered, and there is an excellent degree of uniformity throughout the world. TEC gives easy access to every type of subject matter required, and is usually packaged in an attractive, educational and most versatile way. From the age of four years, when formal education begins, children are perfectly used to and at ease with the computerised way of assimilating knowledge.

It is thought that there is far more to education than merely absorbing facts, and children are taught from an early age to be independent, courageous and adventurous. Many schemes involve space travel and camping expeditions to other planets, and all children are actively involved in sector projects, which give them a sense of duty and worth to the community as a whole.

## HEALTH CARE.

Health care is uniformly good, and there is a high standard of care throughout the world, possibly because it is both standardised and socialised, being paid for by direct taxation.

Health in general is excellent, and life expectancy has risen dramatically, the normal life span now being 100+ planet years. Most major diseases have been conquered, or are curable. Cancer, in all its forms, is a treatable disease, no longer to be feared, thanks to genetic engineering techniques which enable scientists to replace mutant genes with perfect ones.

Spare part surgery is also commonplace, now that the rejection problems have been overcome. In fact, there is excellent knowledge of auto-immunity within the body, enabling the successful implantations of synthetic, durable organs, rather than human cadaver organs, which are not so durable. The knowledge of the auto-immune processes have also enabled physicians to cure successfully diseases such as arthritis and disseminated sclerosis.

In the field of infection control, powerful virus vaccines and "One Day" antibiotics have replaced conventional antibiotics, thus reducing the risk of creating mutant strains of resistant bacteria and virus. Vaccines are also used to prevent tooth decay.

Major fields of medicine tend to be the traumatic surgery, psychiatry deep space studies and alien medicine, the latter being of great interest to the young doctors and research workers, many of whom are making a name for themselves in this field.

## ENTERTAINMENT AND SPORT.

Universally, TEC is the major entertainment source. It not only provides twenty four hours of non-stop entertainment in a variety of forms, but also provides any amount of information, music and holographic dioramic "Backgrounds", which can transform a family room into anything from a Terran jungle to a Vulcan desert.

Within the cities, each sector has a thriving entertainment centre, where music, dance, drama and art exhibitions are regularly held in rich profusion, ranging from the classical to the most "Way out" alien style. The Entertainment centres also offer scope for hobbyists and indoor sportists of all kinds.

Great emphasis is placed upon the importance of keeping fit, and nearly everyone, young and old, indulges in some type of outdoor activity or sport. Much use is made of the huge tracts of open, natural countryside, and camping, fishing, mountaineering, sailing and other such pursuits are most popular with everyone. The major team game is still soccer, and there are teams, amateur and professional, in colourful profusion.

"Nightlife" is both sophisticated and expensive, but in each sector there are cosy little bars where the locals can meet without the expense of "Going Downtown".

## SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS AND CONTRACEPTION.

There is a high degree of sexual freedom, and a high degree of tolerance. Sex has long since ceased to be an unmentionable subject, and is a source of genuine pleasure and fulfillment... a healthy, natural approach encouraged by the leading psychologists of the day.

Because of this freedom, contraception is universally accepted, and used by both males and females. Couples tend to have no more than two children. Larger families are considered to be anti-social.

Contraception is safe, simple and effective. The drug, known simply as "The Membrane", is taped onto the inside of the upper arm for two hours, and is absorbed into the bloodstream via the capillaries. It is effective for 300 days.

Such is the effectiveness of the Membrane that abortion is rarely

required for social reasons, but is perfectly acceptable, and is carried out under medical supervision by use of the "One Hour Pill".

#### MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE.

Marriage is thought of as a mere convention, and many couples choose not to go through any form of ceremony, but enter a form of contract with each other which, essentially, safeguards rights to property and the welfare of any children. This, in fact, is the civil rite of any marriage and is necessary by law, although there are many unions of mutual consent... a great burden to the authorities since neither property nor offspring are safeguarded legally.

There is also a wide variety of "Ceremonies" which are coupled with the contract, many of these having a religious or philosophical basis. Some forms of alien marriage ceremonies are becoming very popular amongst the young.

In such a set up, the divorce rate is naturally high, and very easy to obtain. Notice of divorce is given in writing to the civil legal authorities, after which a period of no less than two months must elapse whilst settlement of children and property are dealt with. Then, with the final legal approval of the settlement, the marriage is declared void.

#### THE FAMILY.

The family group is very loosely woven and informal often to the point of non-existence. The tendency to travel and migration, coupled with the high divorce rate, often splits family units. Children are exposed to disorganised family life from an early age, and are very independent of parents. In general, they socialise more with their peers than with their immediate family.

#### CONCLUSION.

The world's population is fit, healthy and well educated. Their living standards are high, and they enjoy life to the full in a world that is beautiful, and free from war and racial intolerance.

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NHRA GRHI.  
(THE REAFFIRMATION)

PROLOGUE.

When the Enterprise was given clearance for standard orbit around the planet Vulcan, and the helmsman made the final manoeuvre, Kirk relaxed.

"Well, here we are!" he announced to no-one in particular. "Ten days R & R while the Enterprise undergoes maintenance. I trust you all spend it wisely. Dismiss, everyone! Have a good time!"

That was what the bridge crew had been waiting for. With the exception of Kirk and Spock they departed. Swiftly, Kirk swivelled in his chair.

"Anything planned, Spock?"

"There is something I must do, sir. Something I have neglected until now, and cannot put off forever." He looked up at Kirk. "I would be honoured if you would accompany me, Captain."

Kirk smiled, genuinely pleased. "Sure, Spock, I'd love to. I had nothing else planned anyway. What do you have in mind?"

Spock steepled his fingers. "First, I must visit my parents. I took the liberty of anticipating your acceptance and have already informed my mother of our impending arrival. Then we will embark upon the Reaffirmation... the Pilgrimage of Nhra Grhi."

CHAPTER 1 : THE HOME-COMING.

They beamed down to the multiple transporter bay of the typical shore-leave base which, like all such bases, was noisy and crowded. Traders in exotic wares mingled with off-duty crews. Bars, hotels and stores of every description were crammed together in seemingly endless profusion. Neither Kirk nor Spock wanted to linger there, so as quickly as they could complete the transaction they hired a ground-car and were soon speeding along the open highway which wound through the reddish-brown hills and scorched landscape.

Within two hours they were within sight of ShiKhar, Spock's home city. Kirk asked Spock to stop on the brow of a hill, and the Vulcan braked the car to a halt. They both climbed out to look down upon the city.

It was a marvellous sight, contrasting surprisingly with its background of desert and tawny hills. Many-faceted buildings rose upwards between public gardens. Pedestrian walkways were tree-lined and well shaded from the heat of the relentless sun. The whole city was surrounded by a continuous landscaped park which shimmered with the hues of shrubs and flowers.

"Spock, it's beautiful!"

The Vulcan nodded a solemn acknowledgement. "ShiKhar was once the principal city of Vulcan," he explained. "The government still convenes here at the High Council Chamber. The whole area has been designed to give its inhabitants peace and beauty." He smiled, very briefly. "We must be on our way. My mother would never forgive me if we were to arrive..."

Inside the beautiful city there was just one major highway for the use of ground-cars. Spock parked theirs at a public port, and carrying their kit they walked the rest of the way. In the relentless heat and thin atmosphere, Kirk was relieved when they turned into a more shaded pathway. It was hemmed in by high garden walls over which trailed vines of purple and ochre. Spock halted at one of the polished wooden gates. It opened silently into a lovely garden, at the end of which was a house.

"Welcome to my home, Jim," he said simply.

The garden was lush and cool, and so peaceful that it was difficult

to believe they were in the centre of a large city. As they went along the path towards the house Amanda came smiling forward to greet them. She touched Spock's upraised fingers in an affectionate greeting.

"Spock, it's so good to see you again!"

"Peace, Mother. I am pleased to see you."

Amanda turned to Kirk and shook his hand warmly. "Captain Kirk, you are an honoured guest. Welcome!"

"I am honoured to be here, Lady Amanda," he told her genuinely.

"Sarek apologises for his absence - an important business appointment in the city which he could not put off - but he will be back shortly. Please come inside. You must be hot and tired after your journey."

The Sareks' home was gracious and peaceful. It was a comfortable, spacious and somewhat old-fashioned place, which made it all the more homely. Sarek's wealth and social standing were certainly unobtrusive, and there was nothing showy. Amanda's influence was everywhere: the bowls of carefully arranged flowers, the afghans over the chair backs, and the books in the recess, all obviously well read.

"First you must refresh yourselves," Amanda ordered kindly. "Then I will show you to your room, Captain. I hope that Spock still remembers his, even though it has been so long..."

"Mother...!" Spock warned gently. Amanda smiled and poured the drinks.

"Nothing alcoholic, Captain, but refreshing."

They lingered over the drinks whilst Kirk admired Amanda's books. She then took him to the guest room, indicated the bathroom, and departed. After Kirk had showered and changed into something less formal than his uniform, Spock tapped gently on the door, and Kirk invited him in. The Vulcan, now dressed informally himself in a plain, sandy-coloured tunic and pants, gazed around the familiar room and sat down.

"Please excuse my mother. She only talks too much because it is so long since she saw me."

"Spock, your mother is a charming lady! It's quite natural for her to be excited by your homecoming. She is Human."

Spock regarded Kirk intently, then gave a rare smile. "It is good to be home," he conceded softly. "And it is good that I am sharing my home with you, Jim Kirk."

## CHAPTER 2 : REFLECTIONS.

Spock was not altogether certain why he had invited Jim Kirk to share his leave. Usually he did not take leave anyway, preferring to spend his free time in quiet meditation. But he knew that his parents would expect him to visit. Besides, there was the matter of the Nhra Grhi. Every Vulcan must complete the pilgrimage at least once, and this was an ideal opportunity. To share the experience with an outworlder was not usual, but the captain was his closest friend. There was so much he wanted to tell Jim Kirk: so much he wanted him to share.

His home never changed much. It was as endurable as the city beyond it. His mother looked older, but she remained the same warm, loving figure who had dominated his childhood: the one person to appreciate his many difficulties.

Walking into the house was like reliving his past. The flowers could have been the ones he remembered as a child. The afghans could

have retained the same folds. And there were the books, well-loved, well read, growing older with their owner, but never discarded. The books had been important to him : a means of escape from the harsh realities of his existence.

The furniture was old-fashioned now, but comfortable and well made. His father had never been one for changing for the sake of fashion. Sarek had always been conservative in his outlook, and except for one time had never stepped out of line with tradition. That one time was when he had married Amanda. Even now the union remained an enigma to his patrician family. Yet it had stood the test of time for over forty years, and there remained a deep-seated loyalty and respect all too often absent from the more usual of Vulcan marriages.

His old room, too, brought back memories. It had been a refuge to him during childhood and adolescence when his many personal difficulties had overwhelmed him the most. Many problems remained, but with adulthood had come maturity and control. Eventually, he had felt strong enough to cope without the security of his room.

Typical of Amanda, she had preserved the room as it had always been. The sleeping couch, covered with the gaily patterned rug; the plain walls, decorated with his childish attempts at traditional artform; the old cupboard, filled with boyhood treasures; the old-fashioned photograph of a young boy dressed in a short, simple tunic with his arms clasped lovingly around the shaggy neck of his pet sehlat.

The young Spock had been able to smile so much more readily than the older one, he reflected as he stroked his old lyre, which had given him so much freedom from the inward hurt.

No. Not much was different now... Not his old room, nor himself. Maturity had brought with it a different kind of pain; the one of not being able to express true feelings. How easy it would have been to say to his mother, "I love you." How easy it would have been to say to Jim Kirk, "I love you." But as always the opportunities passed him by. In maturing, in becoming more Vulcan than most Vulcans ever could be he had given up the right of self-expression, perhaps forever.

When his father returned from the city, Spock greeted him formally. He remained wary of Sarek. The breach between them had only recently healed. Sarek, however, seemed genuinely pleased to see him, and greeted Spock and Kirk with a surprising warmth.

"Friendship is highly honoured on Vulcan," Sarek told Kirk, "and I am honoured to welcome my son's friend to our home."

Kirk responded formally but smiling. Sarek turned to Spock. "What are your plans, Spock?"

"I would like to show Jim our city. I then intend to partake of the Nhra Grhi."

His father, not wanting to embarrass Kirk, slipped easily into the common Vulcan language. "Our rituals for outworlders, Spock?"

"The Nhra Grhi is the reaffirmation of life. James Kirk is my Kahn Lawh, and the pilgrimage does not exclude personal friends." In English, he said, "Jim does not yet know of the implications of Nhra Grhi. We must enlighten him before we set out upon our journey."

"I would certainly like to know what it entails," Kirk agreed. "I know little of your rituals."

"Then I shall be your instructor, Captain," Sarek offered quickly. "You must know the purpose of your journey before you begin." He smiled; always so confident, he was able to express himself so much more readily than his son.



Amanda hovered. "Please spare Jim your explanations until tomorrow, Sarek!" she chided gently. "He must be weary after his journey, and he is not yet used to our thin atmosphere. He needs to rest and..."

"Mother...!" Spock warned for the second time that day.

Sarek sighed, easing himself into a chair. "You know what your mother is like, Spock. I have tried unsuccessfully for years to change her."

Spock was beginning to relax in his father's company at last. "Yes," he replied teasingly, "I know exactly what you mean. She always was most illogical. I have often wondered why you married her."

"It did seem..."

"...logical at the time!" Amanda replied laughingly. "Spock, Sarek, that joke of yours is years old!" She turned to Kirk. "Although Vulcans will tell you they never joke, Jim, they make a fair attempt. Come - let us leave this... illogical pair; I wish to show you my garden."

### CHAPTER 3 : THE IDIC GARDEN.

"Your garden is beautiful!" Kirk told Amanda appreciatively.

"Thank you, Jim. I like to think I have a way with flowers, although our gardener often disputes the fact. This is an IDIC garden. Many different textures, shapes and colours combine harmoniously to create the whole. I like it here. It is a peaceful place."

Kirk smiled - he liked Amanda. "Spock would have me believe that Vulcan is such an austere world, but I find it much different from that. It is a place of peace and beauty."

"Spock is more Vulcan than a Vulcan. He has to be, and that makes him more austere than any Vulcan I know. He does have beauty and poetry, but they are locked inside of him. He cannot express himself adequately because he is not at peace with himself. Both Sarek and I have failed him there."

"You seem to know Spock more than he knows himself."

"I think... I hope... I do. Spock's childhood and adolescence were not happy years. He had so many problems, problems so personal he could not discuss them... even with his father. He has improved these past few years; he is more relaxed, more sure of himself. That is due to you, Jim. Your friendship."

"I can't claim all the credit. Sure, Spock has found security in Starfleet, but he has had to meet things half way."

"But you, Jim Kirk, are his Kahn Lawh."

"Kahn Lawh?"

"A Vulcan term, difficult to translate. I'm sure Spock would explain more fully. Essentially, it means that you are a special friend. For someone like Spock such friendship does not come easily."

"Then he does me great honour," Kirk said sincerely. "Friendship does not come easily to me either."

"You have no family?"

"One nephew, Peter. My brother and his wife are both dead. I rarely see Peter. He lives with his maternal grandparents, which is perhaps as well - I'm not particularly good with children."

"You have no-one special?"

"The Enterprise. My crew say I'm married to her. There were two

special people. One died in a street accident, the other also died with the child she was bearing."

"A lonely man," Amanda agreed. "I understand all ship's captains are so." She looked up at the darkening sky. "Soon, it will be night. On Vulcan there is neither dusk nor moonlight, and I still miss both. I think I will go back to the house now, but please remain here if you wish!"

"Thank you. I find the coolness pleasant after the heat."

Kirk watched Amanda walk towards the house. One helluva woman, he thought as he wandered at leisure through the garden, enjoying the coolness of the evening.

#### CHAPTER 4 : KOON-UT-KAL-I-FEE.

Early the following morning over a breakfast of toasted grain and kamsin milk Sarek explained to Kirk the purpose of Nhra Grhi.

"Simply translated, it means "Re-affirmation", the Vulcan told him quietly. "Therefore, Nhra Grhi is a pilgrimage to re-affirm the pathways of one's life, in order to seek the meaning of one's present and future existence. Fragmentation becomes a whole, and life becomes One." Sarek smiled at him. "It is said, Captain, that to partake of the Nhra Grhi with one's Kahn Lawh - close friend - will assist both participants to become as One. The traverse life's pathways together and are co-joined in the final re-affirmation." His expressive eyes appraised Kirk for a moment, then he nodded. "I am well pleased that my son has chosen you. Go in peace to your Nhra Grhi together. Return as One."

Soon afterwards they said goodbye to Amanda and Sarek, shouldered their packs and set out to retrieve the hired ground car. The fiery ball of Vulcan's sun was already above the horizon as they started off along the main highway towards the scorching desert beyond ShiKhar. Ten kilometers from the city they halted at a spot so achingly familiar to them both.

There was nothing, now, to disturb the tranquillity and isolation of the ancient circle of stone; no chimes, no throne, no suggestion of a challenge laid down and taken. For this was Koon-ut-kal-i-fee - the place of marriage and challenge.

Spock's features barely changed as he climbed down from the car. Silently, he moved towards the ancient stones, his feet disturbing the dust and a family of brightly coloured lizards. Kirk climbed out too, but did not disturb Spock's reverie, realising how painful his memories must have been. After several minutes the Vulcan roused and turned round to look directly at Kirk.

"The only regret I have concerning this place," he stated quietly, "is that I almost killed you."

"I'm still alive to tell the tale, so no harm done, eh?"

"No thanks to me," Spock said solemnly, and turned back to touch the worn stone. "I did not want or need marriage. For me it would have been most unacceptable. Technically, T'Pring and I were married when we were seven years old. The union could have been nullified when I entered Starfleet service, but for some reason it never was. T'Pring's challenge was not entirely unexpected. Even here, on Vulcan, I am what I am."

"If T'Pring's challenge was made because of your parentage..."

"Not entirely," Spock answered shortly. He did not seem to want to talk any more of the disastrous 'marriage', and Kirk did not press him. Taking the initiative, he climbed back into the car, and Spock followed him silently.

They continued to travel across the bleak, searing desert towards the tawny mountain. There was little sign of life apart from the lizards and an occasional ground car bound for Shikhar.

Kirk travelled with his own memories. Somehow, the strange circle of stones they had had left behind in the dry, thirsty desert stirred up the thought of his own encounters. Edith Keeler... Edith... Even now, after all this time, the hurt of the long-remembered loss remained.

It had had to be : her tragedy. And in being, it had brought an everlasting pain which was always so close to the surface of his mind. Their love had been so good. With Edith his life would have been richly rewarding.

But he was James Kirk, Captain of the Starship Enterprise. Edith was dead. Her time had not been his. Perhaps some day, he thought hopefully, the sense of loss would diminish, and he would remember only the joy of those few precious days they shared together.

## CHAPTER 5 : THE BONDING.

Spock too remembered.

The girl-child had been just seven years old, and already very beautiful. His father had taken him to the traditional Place of Bonding... Kal-tu-Lahk... on foot. Out beyond the confines of the city, into the desert, and down into the Vale of Winds... to Kal-tu-Lahk.

Despite his mere seven years, Spock had not flinched from duty, and had stepped out manfully beside Sarek. He had been trained to his Vulcan heritage from birth... far better than most boys... and endured the hardships of the long walk through the desert in stoic silence.

They had finally reached Kal-tu-Lahk, a barren dust-bowl in the centre of the Vale of Winds, the traditional site of bonding for his clan since recorded time. T'Pau was already seated upon her throne, and Spock had gazed up at her in awe. Beside her were the bearers of the chimes.

Sarek and Spock had approached the throne, and Sarek had given T'Pau the Vulcan salute.

"Live long and prosper, T'Pau."

"Live long and prosper, Sarek. Thee has brought thy son for bonding?"

"I have, T'Pau, as it is written in the laws of our clan." Spock felt himself being pushed gently forward. "My son, T'Pau, whose name is Spock."

T'Pau's all-seeing eyes had rested upon the small, dusty body. He had been tall for his age, but had felt so insignificant in her presence.

"Thee has instructed thy son, Sarek?"

"In all our ways, T'Pau."

"Spock, step closer."

He had taken three steps closer to the throne, gazing up at her. He had seen her only once before, at the death of his grandfather. Her face was cold... emotionless. So different from his own mother, that beautiful Terran woman who was so warm and gentle.

"Spock, son of Sarek, thee has come to this place of bonding for the ceremony handed down by our forefathers in readiness for Pon Farr, when the bondmate thy father has chosen for thee will serve thy body. Do thee understand?"

"I understand, T'Pau."

He had understood Pon Farr, that time of madness. He had seen his father in the condition, and had witnessed what that madness had made him do to his mother. He had not liked it. But he was a Vulcan, and so too was the madness : as inescapable as the bonding.

T'Pau had signalled to the bearers. Their chimes had tinkled in the hot, still air.

"Let the bonding ceremony begin!"

Spock was led by his father into the centre of the dust bowl. From the opposite direction had come his bondmate and her father, walking slowly towards them.

He had not seen the girl before. She was small for her age, and coldly beautiful. If she had felt resentful at being bonded to a half-Terran, then he had not been able to read it in her deep, dark eyes.

She had stopped in front of him, and their eyes had met. T'Pau had lifted her hand, and the bearers had ceased the shaking of their chimes. As the tinkling echo had died away, T'Pau had addressed the two children.

"Spock, son of Sarek, T'Pring, daughter of Spon, prepare to be bonded, as thy parents were bonded, and their parents."

Spock had felt easier knowing the girl's name. It gave her individuality. T'Pring... all Vulcan was in that name.

Slowly and very gently he had stretched out his hands and touched her forehead. T'Pring had emulated him. He had felt her cool, sensitive fingers on his own hot forehead.

He had closed his eyes to help him concentrate. The bearers had begun to intone a monotonous chant, and his body had swayed to the rhythm.

He had been on fire with a strange and unfamiliar passion; not unpleasant, but very disturbing. His body and mind had been aflame, his personality stripped away to make blurred images in his mind. Slowly, the images had taken shape, and had become the personality of T'Pring... merging... melting with his own until they became one entity. He : Spock. She : T'Pring. Bonded together until the time of his first Pon Farr.

"We are One!" Spock had chanted, and his mind and body had suddenly been released from the fiery passion.

"We are One!" T'Pring had echoed, and the release had been made final.

T'Pring had been the first one to fall forward into the dust. It was usual at the time of bonding, for the mind-meld was exhausting for a child so young. Spock had fought against unconsciousness. He had needed to prove to all those present that he was wholly Vulcan. T'Pau had intoned the last chant of the ceremony.

"The bonding of thy son, Sarek, to thy daughter, Spon, is now complete. Thy children will not meet again until Pon Farr. Take thy children from this place of bonding. Live long and prosper."

Swiftly, the darkness had descended upon the young boy, Spock.

## CHAPTER 6 : LAIKHAR.

Edith... Edith Keeler... In painful flashes of searing memory, he remembered.

Kirk had never before allowed himself to dwell upon their time together, and had - or thought he had - pushed to the far reaches of his mind the tragic circumstances of her death. But now, the memory came flooding painfully back to him.

Her gentle, loving touch... her voice, tender and sweet... their beautiful relationship, severed forever. His time had not been hers, and the penalty had been her death...

"Your ways are perhaps better." Spock's reflective voice broke his train of thought abruptly. Unaccountably annoyed at the intrusion, Kirk looked up at Spock sharply.

"You think so?" he snapped.

"To choose one's partner... yes, that is logical... or not to choose a partner at all, each according to his requirements. It is the only way."

"It can be painful at times. Most of us do not choose a partner merely because we require one! Love comes into the choice someplace. And there are mistakes, tragedies, memories almost too painful to bear, longing which might never be fulfilled..."

"I am aware of the multi-faceted nature of Terran love, Jim."

"I expect," Kirk snapped, "you read about it someplace!"

Instantly, he wished he had not said that. He had been irritated, and sarcasm did not go down too well with the over-sensitive Vulcan. Outwardly Spock did not change, but he seemed to inwardly shrink away somehow.

"I'm sorry, Spock." Kirk apologised gruffly. "That damned marriage place... It brought back memories for me too, I guess. Painful memories of what might have been."

"No matter." Spock's tone was offended. "I was about to say..." He faltered uncharacteristically. "No matter," he repeated, then lapsed into silence.

At midday they halted and ate and drank from their provisions. Spock remained tense, and Kirk knew from long experience that the Vulcan was edgy after the morning's unfortunate incident. After a short rest they continued their journey in virtual silence.

Soon, the mountains loomed up before them on the near horizon, rising sheer from the desert floor of endless ochre sand. The rugged peaks shimmered in the harsh brilliance of the sun, menacingly beautiful.

Closer, were angular, wind-scoured dunes on which grow grey-leaved scrub clinging tenaciously to the friable earth. Deftly, Spock manoeuvred the car through the dunes, which stretched in a seemingly endless vista towards the feet of the mountains. It was surprising, therefore, when they came to an abrupt end at the perimeter of a huge dust-bowl, several kilometers in diameter. Crumbling grey stone rose from the dust. Broken walls, turrets, towers, portals, all decaying in the awesome heat. Spock brought the car to a halt and climbed out, and Kirk followed. They stood on the dusty lip of the sand-bowl, gazing down at the sad, mouldering ruins.

"LaiKhar," Spock explained shortly. "Once a city the size and beauty of ShiKhar."

"What happened?"

"Greed. War. This desert was once a vast, fertile plain. Avaricious landowners eventually reduced the whole area to desert. Then came the last of our many wars, and LaiKhar was finally reduced to rubble. Soon, the desert created by our forefathers encroached upon it. Not too far into the future, LaiKhar will be overwhelmed completely."

"You sound almost poetical, Spock."

"No. Just sad."

They began to scramble downwards towards the ruins, until they

reached what was once the city gates. A massive lintel lay smashed in the sand. Vulcan script was clearly visible etched into the stone. Spock bent down, translating the script as he brushed it clear of dust with his hand.

"Stranger, welcome. Enter LaiKhar with Peace, and leave her in the joy of her beauty." He stood up, his eyes searching the sad ruins. "We came here as children, for here we began to learn of our history, and learned the first lesson concerning our personal lives. Life that is a desert will crumble and die as LaiKhar crumbled and died. But the life-desert is self-inflicted, as this desert was, and can be overcome as this desert never will be. The citadel of Life can be rebuilt, providing that inspiration, peace and logic prevail."

"A neat allegory, Spock, but none too easy, I guess."

"No," Spock agreed quietly. "It is not easy."

## CHAPTER 7 : LONELINESS.

They camped for the night in the craggy foothills above the ruined city on a sheltered plateau in which grew sweet-smelling An-Kal bushes. The perfume of them was heavily laden in the thin, crisp air as they settled down in the ground car to rest. Almost immediately Kirk fell to sleep, leaving Spock alone in the thick blanket of darkness.

It was not his nature to indulge in self-pity, and he was not - or so he told himself - indulging in it now. He was merely analysing his thoughts and attempting to place them in some sort of logical order.

That the Human and Vulcan races would forever misunderstand each other was nothing new to Spock. He had been aware of it from early childhood. His father on Earth, his mother on Vulcan... and himself...

He allowed himself an enigmatic smile, so brief that anyone watching might not have been aware of it.

Spock knew more than most about the loneliness of isolation and of rejection; although, he admitted cautiously to himself, it had perhaps been much of his own doing, like the self-inflicted desert, and the ruins of LaiKhar. For much of his life he had shied away from any sort of lasting relationship, fearing rejection, fearing an involvement which might reveal his inner self.

He turned a reflective face towards Jim Kirk. Kirk... his exception to every one of his own strictly laid-down rules. In the beginning, he had not wanted or sought after Kirk's friendship. Yet again, his old fears had denied him the inner satisfaction of friendship - a relationship he knew he so badly needed.

But somehow, despite all the obstacles he had purposely placed in the way of friendship, the relationship had grown. Now, it was so strong, so enduring, that it hurt him to realise that he could not express adequately enough to Kirk exactly what he felt.

Somewhere in the darkness of the mountains a wild animal howled plaintively. Jim Kirk turned in his sleep, his breathing deep and regular.

\* So easy...\* Spock thought. \* So easy to stretch out my hand... to wake you... to tell you how I feel...

Love? No, Jim, my knowledge was not gained from books or library tapes. It was you! You taught me to love. And it hurts... Oh how it hurts! So easy... but perhaps tomorrow. Tomorrow I will tell you, Jim, my friend...

Sometimes, I wish the darkness would last forever...\*

## CHAPTER 8 : THE BEAUTY OF UGLINESS.

The hot, fiery dawn was just beginning to break over the horizon of desert and mountains when Kirk woke up, refreshed after a good night's sleep. He was not surprised to discover that Spock was already up and preparing breakfast. The Vulcan glanced up as Kirk emerged from the ground car.

"Good morning, Jim. Sleep well?"

"Sure, thanks." He yawned and stretched, sniffing into the air. "Say, that smells good. I never knew you could cook!"

"We are taught the art of survival in the desert from an early age. I have prepared Tai-Lar. Please, eat."

Kirk enjoyed his breakfast in the open, the heat not yet too uncomfortable for him. The Tai-Lar, flat pancakes made of Vulcan wheat, were excellent, and Spock appeared to be in far better humour than the day before. After a leisurely meal they prepared the ground car and continued their journey at an easy-going pace.

With their backs to the great, dusty desert, they were soon climbing higher into the mountains, following a little-used trail which wound through the precipitous crags, sheer on either side. Every kilometre or so of the trail was marked off by neatly built stone buildings. Each one had a doorway, but no window of any kind. They were deserted, and there was no sign of life. Spock halted at one of the crofts, and they climbed out.

"These are the family shrines of the hill people," he explained. "Every family has such a shrine, and one is required to make a pilgrimage to it at least once in one's lifetime."

Kirk encircled the shrine carefully, not wanting to be in breach of Vulcan etiquette. It was well made out of mountain rock, each piece carefully overlapping the other. Above the lintel of the doorway was an inscription which, Spock told him, bore the name and clan of the family.

"I find it strange," Kirk said, "that so much attention is paid to dead relatives. You Vulcans do not acknowledge a Godhead, and yet you worship your ancestors. You..."

"There is no worship involved here. Perhaps - many thousands of years ago - but no longer."

"Then what is the significance of these shrines?"

"A place of peace and meditation. An opportunity to reach back into time and recall one's roots, one's inheritance of life, and in recollection to meditate upon one's own life. The significance, Jim, is Life, not death."

Spock stood inside the doorway, beckoning Kirk. Inside was one square room, dark, damp and empty.

"See, Jim? No ghosts or tombstones of the past to haunt you here. Just emptiness, waiting to be filled with a living presence."

They began to walk back towards the car. "Sometimes," Kirk said softly, "you Vulcans humble us. We Humans have so much to learn."

Spock swung himself up into the driver's seat. "So too have we," he replied as he started up the engine of the ground car.

Thirty kilometres further on the track suddenly began to plunge downwards into a dark, steep-sided valley, overhung by menacing black rocks. Soon, they were travelling through a thick, entangled forest of blue-grey trees, the foliage of which blotted out the brightness of the sun. Overhead wheeled huge black birds of prey, which occasionally dived onto the forest floor then swooped swiftly upwards again towards



the canopy. Eventually the car could travel no further through the undergrowth, and the two men climbed out, preparing to walk.

The sickly stench of decay was laden on the air as they followed the now poorly defined path through the thick mat of branches. Long before the path widened out beside the shore-line of a small lake, Kirk felt exhausted and edgy. The whole forest was sinister and ugly - certainly no place to be admiring the views.

The lake - like the surrounding forest - was an ugly scar upon the surface of the land. The water was dark and smelt evilly of chemicals. In places, the water was eddying dangerously around the black, slime-encrusted rocks sticking up beyond the surface.

"This lake is called K'Aireh," Spock explained. "Roughly translated, it means 'The Beauty of Ugliness'."

"I see much ugliness, but no beauty, Spock!"

Spock nodded solemnly. "K'Aireh is part of our childhood training - a first step to learning the meaning of NOME and the IDIC. There is, after all, a danger in taking things at their face value. Come! I will show you."

For Kirk, the idea of a swim in the dark, evil-smelling water was not much to his liking, but Spock was already stripping off.

"We take the test of K'Aireh at ten years old."

"Okay, so you're telling me to get on with it!" Kirk said amusedly, and reluctantly stripped off his shirt. Spock ignored his remark.

"Vulcans dislike immersing themselves in water. However, I think you will agree that it is worthwhile."

The water was icily cold, but surprisingly refreshing, and they struck out for the centre at an easy pace. For someone who did not like water, Spock was an excellent swimmer.

As they reached the centre of the lake the current became dangerously strong, and Kirk had to struggle to keep his head above the water. Here too the water was deeper, colder, and even more heavily laden with chemicals. He watched Spock indicate downwards towards the black, ugly depths. Following the Vulcan's example, and against his better judgement, he dived.

Lungs at bursting point... Body almost past the point of pain... Sickly taste of chemicals in the mouth... Sudden parting of the water... Air, fresh and clear.

They were in a vast underwater cavern. Kirk stared, awe-struck, not even bothering to wade out of the knee-deep water.

The natural beauty of the cavern was awe-inspiring. Crystallised chemicals shone like stars from the myriad cracks in the rocks, giving the whole area a rich, bright glow. Fantastic crystalline shapes of every hue and contour rose upwards from the floor like growing, living things. At the far end, crystal-clear water tumbled downwards over the crystalline shapes, disappearing in a foamy torrent into a deep crevasse.

"Spock, it's beautiful!"

"Yes, it is," Spock agreed. "Imagine the impact upon a ten-year-old child. The forest and the lake above are ugly and sinister. And suddenly, there is beauty. The ugliness and danger are forgotten in the wonder of nature."

Kirk smiled. "Spock, you are a poet!"

Spock did not answer. Kirk had not expected him to. But he did sense something in his companion. A relaxation - a sigh, unheard and unexpressed.

In silence they wandered around the fantastic wonderland of nature.

Suddenly Spock broke their silence, very softly.

"K'Aireh is well named, and taken from life itself. In every part of ugliness there is beauty. But the beauty is hard-won. It has to be sought after. It must come from here..." Gently, he touched Kirk's chest at the level of his heart.

The gesture surprised Kirk. Usually, Spock disliked the use of his tactile senses. Surprise, however, quickly changed to a loving admiration for the lonely Vulcan who always found difficulty in expressing his true feelings. He caught Spock's hand, touched it briefly.

"Spock, I understand."

Spock smiled. Together, it seemed to Kirk, they communed.

## CHAPTER 9 : S'RENK.

During the early morning stillness of the third day, Spock stood upon the brink of destiny - his destiny - gazing downwards at the awful, cavernous split in the crust of the mountains known as S'Renk. Here, in the distant past of Vulcan, a gigantic cataclysm had wrenched stone and rock, had torn the very mountain into two. And here, too, in the not-so-distant past, Spock had also been torn into two by a very different cataclysm.

For here, in the horrific depths of S'Renk, Spock had undergone the infamous L'Kinata - the ultimate test of manhood. L'Kinata was so dreaded that it was entirely non-obligatory, and there was only one chance to pass the test. Failure meant certain death. Spock, as his father had done before him, had passed L'Kinata with honour, giving him the right to wear the 'Lirpa' symbol on his clan toga.

What had he needed to prove, all those many years ago? Even now, he was not exactly certain. Maybe, he reasoned, to gain his father's approval: an approval always one step ahead of him.

He remembered vividly the sheer physical torment of L'Kinata: of survival against all predictions within the terrible, grinding, sulphuric deep of S'Renk. It had been animal instinct that had kept him alive for the full four Vulcan weeks of the trail: an instinct, born of the savagery of his Vulcan forebears. Earth, fire, water. The three ancient elements had done their best to destroy him. Somehow, he had emerged alive.

Yet the physical agony of L'Kinata was soon made insignificant, for it had been his father who had given to him the mental anguish: the cataclysm which had wrenched his hitherto ordered life apart.

One thing had remained to be done when he had finally emerged from S'Renk... to forge the final, permanent symbol of having endured L'Kinata...

He had taken the blade into his hand, willing himself not to show fear of the pain to Sarek and his uncle, his chosen witnesses for this final act. The cut was required to be clean and swift. Gritting his teeth against the certain pain he had sliced deep into the flesh of his own foreskin.

The blood had welled and begun to run sticky between his fingers. Somehow, he had managed to remain silent, whilst his uncle had sealed the bleeding wound with the traditional Tamil-bark poultice.

Reeling slightly, he had stood up and faced his father, longing most desperately for approval, equality, acceptance.

There had been none of those things, however. Sarek had merely given him a single glance which had been so infinitely cold, then had turned abruptly and walked deliberately away.

And in that single moment Spock had known what he must do; from that point onwards there was no place for him on Vulcan.

CHAPTER 10 : THE OASIS OF KADAHK.

To Kirk there was something oppressive and evil about S'Renk, not entirely due to the terrifying vista of rock torn apart and caverns forged by violent nature. The oppressiveness was something more primeval: a fundamental part of every being, the dark side of oneself.

Spock's tension had returned, to the point where he became decidedly introverted, as though he was reliving a personal nightmare. Kirk knew of the test of L'Kinata, but instinctively realised that memories of the test were not the cause of the Vulcan's present mood, and he guessed that something else had happened here: something even more terrible than the test itself.

This time, however, Spock was giving nothing away, and Kirk respected his friend's silence, having no wish to intrude upon a private grief. All the same, he found himself longing to be able to communicate with him: to be able to say, without fear of rejection, "Spock, I am your friend. Please give me your trust."

But Spock was not ready for that... Perhaps he never would be, and Kirk knew that he would have to patiently bide his time.

It was during the late afternoon, when Spock had meditated and Kirk had rested in the car away from the weakening heat, that they finally left S'Renk. Spock seemed as relieved as Kirk to leave the place far behind them.

After travelling in silence for some time, Spock looked up at Kirk, smiling briefly.

"On the other side of these mountains is an oasis called Kadhak. We should reach there before nightfall. Kadhak is very beautiful, the opposite of S'Renk. Tomorrow is the last day of our outward journey. It will be pleasant to end it upon a note of beauty."

For over two hours they continued to thread their precarious way across the mountains, the road plunging steeply now, and affording magnificent views across the foothills and desert. To the west Spock pointed out a patch of colour in the tawny landscape - the Oasis of Kadhak. As yet it was some forty kilometres or more away, a shimmering spot upon the horizon.

Slowly the terrain began to change. Rocks became desert... the desert sprouted life... sand dunes produced a gorgeous array of spiky blooms... and eventually, just before the swift setting of the sun, they came to the Oasis of Kadhak.

The beauty was astounding, consisting of five kilometres of unsurpassed wealth of flora. Tall, blue-green grass sheltered delicate blossoms. Sweetly perfumed bushes were bowed with the weight of their fruit and flowers, all fed by a sweet-water spring which bubbled up from the depths of the oasis and trickled in delta-like rivulets to every part of the oasis. It was like a dream. Only when Kirk climbed from the car and felt the grass beneath his foot did he believe his senses.

Until darkness came they spent their time wandering through the pleasant oasis, then returned to the car to eat their evening meal. That night they slept beneath the stars, and Kirk did not wake until the sun was high over the horizon, completely refreshed.

Soon afterwards Spock led him on foot through an orchard of fruit trees two kilometres west of their camp. On the other side, sheltered from the hot sun by tall, blossom-laden trees, was a small thatch-builtcroft. Spock stopped beside the open doorway, and Kirk could smell an apple-like aroma coming from the interior, reminiscent of his boyhood.

Spock turned to him. "Sankalek lives here, the wise man of Kadhak."

Legend has it that he is as old as the oasis itself. Certainly, he is very old. The doorway to his home is low, for it is said that Sankalek is so wise that all creatures must bow before him. Come, Jim. Follow me. We will visit the wise old man of Kadhahr...."

## CHAPTER 11 : SANKALEK.

The dwelling place of Sankalek was simple. A hollowed-out tree trunk served as both table and bed. In one corner were piles of fruit - the old man's staple diet, of which the oasis yielded plenty. In the other the ancient Vulcan sat cross-legged upon the floor, dressed in a ragged toga of indeterminate clan. Beside him, docile and patient and obviously old, sprawled the shaggy body of a near-toothless schlat. At the two visitors' approach the old man placed a hand upon the animal's neck, and intently surveyed them with blind, opaque eyes.

"Welcome, oh Searchers of Truth." He spoke in the ancient language of Spock's people.

"Welcome, Sankalek, Giver of Truth," Spock replied, indicating to Kirk that he should seat himself upon the floor. Spock too settled himself. "We are travelling the way of my Nhra Grhi. My companion cannot understand our words, Master. He is an outworlder."

"An outworlder, my son?"

"Nevertheless, my Kahn Lawh, for he has given me much, and taught me so many things. He is my friend, Sankalek, and for me friendship is not easy."

"Friendship is not easy for any Vulcan. It cannot be born of emotion, but must be moulded from logic, knowledge, understanding, and the fellowship of being One. Only then can you relate in the spirit of Kahn Lawh."

"All this I know, Wise One, for I have been well schooled in the traditions of my people. My father is Sarek, my clan..."

The old man raised his hand, indicating silence. "Tell me no more, for I know you now, though my eyes are blind. Spock, son of Sarek, you came to me once before when you were troubled."

"You gave me solace, Sankalek. You pointed the way for me to go. That way was not an easy one for me. I knew it would not be so, and compensated for the fact. Through you, I foresaw the difficult times ahead... all save one." He turned his head briefly towards Kirk. The old man sensed the movement, and nodded.

"Are you afraid of this friendship, Spock?"

"I have never experienced a relationship such as this before."

"Then you are not afraid of the friendship itself, but of the loneliness of your inner self. You are afraid because you cannot bridge the gulf of cultures, and that your private longing to be filled remains unassuaged. Did you not learn that one's own fulfillment is an important concept within the meaning of NOME?"

"Indeed, Sankalek, you impart the truth. But I am what I am. I lack both words and wisdom to impart Kahn Lawh to him. Above all, I lack the emotional strength I would require should he reject me. Sankalek, give me the words, the wisdom, the strength."

Sankalek looked directly into Spock's eyes. Although the old man was blind, Spock felt as though his very self was being searched. Slowly, Sankalek shook his head.

"You have the qualities already, Spock. I can impart nothing else to you, save for one piece of advice. Search for the things you seek from

within. Then choose your pathway as you chose once before. Do not fear your own decision. You have the courage to know yourself, and the fortitude to be at peace.

I know that from early childhood you have been unhappy and troubled. Perhaps it is now the time, at the beginning of your second trimester, to take from life what you have so sorely lacked. Do not fear illogic. Is it not more logical to discover inner Truth : to be at peace? This outworlder is indeed your Khan Lawh. Seated close to him, I can feel the thought-waves of Terran love and understanding emanating from him. Declare yourself to him, Spock, and be as One."

For several minutes Spock remained thoughtfully silent. Then he bent forward and touched the old man's forehead.

"Peace, Sankalek," he said quietly.

Peace, Spock," Sankalek replied.

## CHAPTER 12 : A CONVERSATION.

Kirk understood nothing of the conversation between Spock and Sankalek, but his poor knowledge of the Vulcan language did not prevent him from appreciating - at least in part - the poignancy of the situation, or the wisdom and inner beauty of the old man.

He had always known that Spock was a deeply unhappy, troubled individual who was constantly at war with himself. Only rarely did the Vulcan allow any hint of his personal unhappiness to become apparent, and the journey of Nhra Grhi had been one of those occasions. In four days Kirk had seen more of the real Spock than he had seen in all the years he had known him. Now, he felt a most urgent need to reach out to his friend, to say to him, "Spock, trust me. Unburden your troubled mind. I will understand."

But Kirk fully realised the limit of his own capabilities. To any of his other friends he could have offered help without hesitation. Spock was different. To penetrate that protective shell of Vulcanism required a skill he knew he did not possess.

Eventually Spock took his leave of Sankalek. Kirk rose to follow, but the old man detained him with gentle pressure on his hand. Quietly, Spock made his exit alone.

"What is your name, Outworlder?" Sankalek asked, speaking in the Standard Galactic Language.

"James Kirk."

The old man smiled briefly. "It is written that to know one's name is to learn the secrets of one's inner nature. Not altogether true or logical, but useful as an indicator. James Kirk, I can ask a question of you, a Terran, because you will understand and not take offence. Do you love Spock?"

The question took Kirk off guard. "I... He is my friend," he answered evasively.

"That is not what I asked you."

This time, Kirk answered more carefully. "If love means trust, respect and understanding, if it means the ability to share and hope...then yes, Sankalek, I do love Spock. Some of those qualities are missing from our relationship, but there is time. There is hope."

"Spock does not choose his friends lightly, James Kirk, and his judgement is unimpaired, despite the torment within himself. He has chosen

well. Peace, live long and prosper. May you find much fulfillment and contentment."

Dismissed, Kirk rose to his feet. Lightly, he touched the old man on the hand, then emerged into the sunlight. Spock was some way off, obviously meditating. Not wanting to disturb him, Kirk wandered off in the opposite direction, enjoying the beauties of the Vulcan oasis.

### CHAPTER 13 : NHRA GRHI.

On the dark horizon the city of ShiKhar glittered with a myriad of lights. She looked like one of the mythical cities from Amanda's book of fairy stories. Spock had read so many of the stories as a child, and they had filled him with wonder. Now he allowed himself the brief luxury of being Human, indulging in fantasy-thoughts of fairy castles. It was so unlike himself that he smiled, then glanced across to Jim Kirk.

Ever since their visit to Sankalek of Kadahr they had both been introspective, drinking deeply from their own thoughts. There had been a different quality to their relationship : a closeness... an almost metaphysical bond of love.

Surprised that the present situation should affect him so much, he leaned forward and very gently touched Kirk's hand.

"Jim, let me tell you of a very special thing... of Love and Peace... and of Kahn Lawh..."

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## STARSHIP ROUTINE AND SERVICE.

It is important to remember that the crews of the Starships are not always in the midst of danger and high adventure. Certainly, the unpredictable can happen, and it is only at these times that we are able to glimpse into their world of stars and infinite space. Reality, however, is perhaps less exciting, and for much of the time the Starship personnel live routine, organised lives when nothing out of the ordinary may happen for long periods of time. Their courage in seeking out new worlds and new civilizations is well attested, and this report will discuss the routine nature of Starship service.

### STARDATE.

This is the principal unit of time used by all Federation deep space vessels in their official logs. It records date, time, position and velocity. Because of warp drive it is impossible to record time by more conventional means.

### THE STANDARD YEAR.

For normal shipboard purposes a standard calendar is used... inaccurate to all except the crew, but necessary for recording events. It is also of psychological advantage to the personnel, who are thus able to record the passage of "Normal" time. It works in similar fashion to the Terran recording system, i.e. one standard hour is sixty standard minutes, twenty four standard hours are one standard day.

### DAY/NIGHT STATUS.

Also for sound psychological reasons each twenty four standard hour period is split into a day and night status, so allowing the body and mind to remain "In Rhythm". Night status lasts for six standard hours, and during this period all non-essential, recreational and living areas are automatically placed in subdued half-light.

### WATCHES.

The starship day is split into three eight hour shifts or "Watches". These are rotated by all personnel from grades Lieutenant-Commander downwards. More senior officers work the two day status shifts in normal circumstances, because this is when the majority of shipboard events and routine work takes place.

### STATUS REPORTS.

At the beginning of each watch, and in each department, personnel familiarise themselves with events by reading the individual status boards... computerised reports of what has happened at that particular station during the previous eight hours. Departmental heads receive an overall status report, and they key this information into the bridge computer for the benefit of the senior officers.

### CAPTAIN/FIRST OFFICER. (Additional Work.)

Although the captain and first officer spend a large proportion of their time on the bridge... usually on alternate daytime watches... they do have other duties to attend to, and therefore rely upon efficient personnel and excellent communications.

"Incident" and departmental briefings and meetings take up a large proportion of on-duty time, as do the numerous quarterly reports that are required by Starfleet Command. "Office work" is an additional workload, and one which is least liked. For all senior Starfleet officers there is a large amount of necessary red tape and paper work to get through, which the majority of them consider to be inhibiting and bureaucratic.



## TRAINING/EDUCATION.

Education is considered to be an ongoing and important facet of Starship life, and a young ensign just beginning his career aboard is also just beginning his education, despite the many previous years of hard work.

There is always on-going assessment by senior officers during the normal course of work, and in addition to this, every Starship carries a fully equipped education department, headed by a Training Officer of at least Lieutenant-Commander rank, which offers not only the opportunity of education and training within the particular field of service, but also to take the standard Starfleet examinations required. Reports on all individuals are sent to the captain and Starfleet H.Q. at regular intervals.

## RECREATION.

Recreation facilities are excellent, and all crew members are encouraged to make use of the facilities to their utmost. Holograph and recreation rooms provide space for personnel to relax and socialise in pleasant surroundings, and there is always one recreation room large enough to accommodate shipboard dances, discos and stage plays.

The gymnasium is another popular area, as most people are anxious to keep fit and active, and nearly everyone indulges in unarmed combat and negative gravity training.

By far the most popular sport, however, is soccer, which commands almost fanatical following, both with players and spectators. Soccer enjoys overriding popularity on Earth, and has also been "exported" to other Federation planets. Whilst space prevents full-scale soccer games aboard ship, the diminutive "seven-a-side" is preferred, and there are regular competitions and inter-departmental matches.

Chess is another popular... and less volatile... game, closely followed and discussed by the majority of Starship personnel. Nearly every ship boasts of at least one Grand Master, and there are endless tournaments and championship matches.

A wide variety of hobbies abound, from hydroponics to classical and alien music, and many enthusiasts form themselves into societies and appreciation groups.

There is a "store" on every ship... run by the quartermaster... selling a limited range of consumer goods. In addition, space stations have well-stocked stores, as do the registered trading vessels, who tend to specialise in the more exotic wares.

Interstellar mail is erratic and uncertain, which sometimes leads to a certain amount of frustration. Contact with family and friends in a physical sense does not happen frequently, and the mail is an important part of life, looked forward to with eagerness and excitement.

## SHORE LEAVE / VACATION LEAVE.

### "Stand-Byes" and Days Off.

Shore-leave can be given at the discretion of the captain during suitable planet-fall, and is usually for a few days only. Vacation leave, however, is statutory as laid down in the Conditions of Service Manual. Leave can be accumulated over a period of three standard years, but has to be taken after that time.

In addition, there are three standard "Stand-By" days which, if circumstances permit, serve as one-day holidays. These are : Federation Day, Christmas Day and Ethnic Day. The latter is taken at the time of an individual's Country of Origin day, (i.e., Thanksgiving Day, British Day, etc.)

Two "days off" each week are also statutory, although in fact this

hardly ever works out, especially in the case of the senior officers.

#### CREWS' QUARTERS.

Quarters are, of necessity, functional, but comfortable. All ranks up to Commander share quarters. Basic accommodation includes sitting room, bedroom, bathroom and toilet. Senior officers have their own quarters which are marginally more spacious and include a private office. Here again, the space premium means that they have to share bathroom and toilet facilities with their nearest neighbours.

Individuals are responsible for their own quarters, and are able to decorate them... within reason... to their particular tastes.

#### FOOD/CLOTHING.

Standard mess-hall food is, in general, "well-balanced", nourishing, and unexciting. It is synthesised, reconstituted protein/vitamin/mineral molecules and comes in a variety of textures and flavours, including those to suit alien tastes. Personnel merely "key in" their selection and receive it via the delivery chute. Coffee and tea are the beverages most highly favoured.

Non-standard food can be purchased occasionally and prepared in the ship's galley by unofficial "chefs" who, despite Starfleet Command's disapproval, undoubtedly use their talents as a profitable sideline.

There is a bar in all main recreation rooms from which can be purchased alcoholic drinks from the mundane to the exotic. (Drunkenness, however, is dealt with most severely.)

There are strict regulations regarding food acquired during planet-fall, particularly if the planet is unknown to the Federation. This is an extremely sensible precaution to safeguard the health of the crew.

All personnel are required to wear regulation uniform whilst on duty. This is of recyclable material and is received fresh each day from the automatic "Laundramat", which is in reality a fibre synthesiser. Off duty casual wear is preferred for the usual pursuits, although the young are extremely fashion-conscious, possibly because they have to wear uniform for so long, and often tend towards the "way-out" and exotic, especially for special occasions. Starfleet issue underwear is also made of recyclable, synthesised material and is brief, cool and comfortable. Personal laundry services are available in all crew-quarter corridors.

#### MEDICAL SERVICES.

Medical services are excellent, with full medical, nursing and technical back-up, and well-equipped surgeries, wards and laboratories, which are under the direct control of the Chief Medical Officer. Because of the nature of a Starship's mission, a great deal of the work in the medical unit is in the traumatic and emergency surgery fields, although there is also wide scope for psychiatry, preventative medicine and research. Rehabilitation is also an important part of the work, as are mass vaccination programmes for planets threatened by disease, and the conveying of vital drugs from one part of the galaxy to another.

Routinely, every member of the crew must have a quarterly medical examination, which includes a psychology check. Everyone must also have the regular, Starfleet-prescribed vaccinations against certain endemic diseases. Recently, Starfleet has also introduced compulsory contraception for both male and female crew personnel. Advice clinics and "Practitioner Surgeries" are run on a daily basis, and it is the CMO's duty to inform the crew before any starbase leave about the dangers of venereal disease.

SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS.

Inevitably, sexual relationships of both hetero- and homosexual nature do occur within a community as large as a starship, and this tends to be accepted as an important aspect of personal liberty and choice, both by the crew themselves, and by psychologists. Rather than ignore this fact, or pretend that it does not happen, Starfleet prudently requires all personnel to have regular contraception (usually in the form of the popular "Membrane".)

Relationships tend towards the informal, very much as attitudes prevailing on Earth, and the greatest majority of personnel prefer this; as career-minded people, they have no wish to forge permanent relationships. Perhaps the contradiction to this general unwritten rule are the homosexual relationships, which tend to be far more stable, loving and sincere.

Marriage is rare between Starship personnel, perhaps because such a relationship would of necessity be incomplete as there would be no question of producing children. "Living together", on the other hand, is not half so rare as Starfleet authorities would like to believe. But the "problem" continues because they are over-anxious not to impinge on the personal liberty of the crews. As long as there is no blatant disregard for other people's feelings, Starfleet Command turn the "blind eye", and leave things up to the discretion of individual commanding officers.

RELIGION.

Except for a vague general belief in a Godhead, personnel tend not to make religion a big part of their lives. Almost as a concession to morality, there is a small interdenominational chapel on every Starship, often duly neglected. This is the only religious facility on board, as there are no chaplains. Many people regard philosophical attitudes as more important than organised religion of any kind, and most of them have at one time or another experimented with "way-out" philosophies. Although Christmas is celebrated, it is a secular rather than a religious occasion.

PAY.

All personnel are highly paid. They receive their salary at three-monthly intervals. Details are placed automatically into the ship's Personnel computer, and individuals receive a print-out at the ritual naval-style "pay parade" which is conducted by a senior officer.

TAXATION.

Everyone, whatever their ethnic origin, has to pay Federation Tax at 7.2%. Certain ethnic groups also pay "home tax" based on the current home rate, (E.G., Vulcans pay a home tax of 9.8% in addition to Federation Tax.) All tax is deducted at source.

PENSIONS.

Pensions are excellent and non-contributory. They provide not only retirement pensions but also disablement, long-term sickness, and dependant allowances. There are many other benefits too, including a large range of social services, and cash grants to retired personnel who wish to resettle.

INVESTMENTS.

Many officers, particularly the more senior ones, invest much of their earnings, and there are a variety of Federation and Starfleet approved methods of doing this. Certain investments are banned to Starfleet personnel (i.e. owning dilithium mining shares.) Many officers favour property, which serves a double purpose, both as investment value and as a private retreat. Because of security risks all investments have to be declared, and failure to do so results in an inquiry into the officer's affairs.

"CREDITS".

Actual money is rarely used... there are far too many forms of it to be of practical use, and it would require large-scale banking facilities aboard each starship, with the inherent problems of exchange-rates, etc. Instead the credit system is universally accepted, although this system, through prolonged use, has now diversified to a situation where personnel can actually obtain credit notes which denote set values.

The major way of exchanging money, however, is by the use of "credit cards" - computerised, personal numbers which can be keyed into any computer on any Federation planet. Providing that the account is in balance (verified immediately) the amount required is automatically deducted, and added to the vendor's own account.

DISCIPLINE.

The usual types of disciplinary procedures aboard Starships are for relatively minor offences, (i.e., failure to carry out an order correctly, brawling, drunkenness, poor time-keeping, minor insubordination, etc.) These offences result in the offender being "confined to quarters" for a specified length of time decided upon by the senior officer, or being "put on report", which is, in effect, a warning. Both actions result in the offender's name, rank and serial number being recorded in the personnel computer. The former means certain deduction of pay : the latter, a fine only when three such "reports" have been given. More serious offences result in court-martial, which is conducted at the nearest Starbase.

STARBASES.

Starbases are strategically placed throughout the Federation, some being attached to planets, others man-made satellites. These are the major administrative bases of Starfleet Command, and are in the direct control of an officer of at least Commodore rank, depending upon the size of the base.

All contain a whole range of administrative, medical and support facilities, including maintenance crews, staple-goods warehouses, and base hospitals. There are also shore-leave facilities for Starship crews, including sports and recreation facilities, hostels, landscaped parks, educational establishments, and many different stores, bars and restaurants.

Beyond the control of Starfleet Command, however, are the notorious "Starbase Cities" which, on the majority of planet-based Starbases, have sprung up alongside, built by speculators with a quick eye to profit, their business including everything from legitimate stores, restaurants and hotels to vice rings and well organised crime.

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MORE THAN THE MOONLIGHT.1.

A ripple of excitement seemed to run through every fibre of the Enterprise as the bridge crew made the final, complicated docking procedure. Far below, beyond the vast Starship docks which stretched out into moonlit space : below the soaring gantries and the ceaseless motion of men and machines was "Home" to the vast majority of the crew. For the planet around which the Starfleet dockyards circled was Earth, and there was the exciting prospect of three weeks leave whilst the Starship underwent her major overhaul of the year.

Spock did not relax, even when the last manoeuvre had been completed and he had given the crew permission to dismiss. Some of the bridge personnel who knew him best tried hard to curb their natural enthusiasm for a time : did their utmost to communicate their own brand of fellow-feeling towards a colleague in distress. They all failed. It was something which none of them were capable of. Only one man was able to reach beyond the hard veneer of Vulcanism. One person... and he was...

Spock waited until the commander of the maintenance crew had taken over in the officially-prescribed manner before he left the bridge. He went directly to sickbay, a journey he had made so often in the past few weeks. As always, the instruments registered vibrant, pulsating life.

But the life was empty... useless. Spock stared down at his friend, who looked up at him uncomprehendingly.

"Oh Jim!..." Not many situations could have wrenched that cry from the Vulcan's lips. He felt a gentle hand on his shoulder. It was McCoy.

"I'm sorry, Spock. Sorry I couldn't have done more." McCoy looked very tired. Jim Kirk was his friend too.

"You have done all that is possible, doctor. Perhaps more besides." He looked down at the captain again. "There could still be a way..."

"No, Spock! It's far too dangerous. One ruined life is enough, and he would not want his at the expense of yours. Two years... ten... eventually there'll be some recovery. There is no recovery from death."

The doors opened and the medic-team from Starbase hospital bustled in, unaware that their presence was an intrusion into very personal grief.

"Captain Kirk?" enquired the medical officer, and McCoy pointed to him, giving brief instructions. Both men waited until they had taken Kirk away, staring down reflectively at the now empty, crumpled bed. Spock snapped out of his mood decisively. Had he not done so, he knew that Human emotions would have gotten the better of him. Even so, he mistrusted the evenness of his voice.

"I must go. I have a debriefing session at Starbase H.Q."

"Then I'll go with you, Spock. Make sure Jim is settled into his new environment. I'm not meeting my daughter until tomorrow."

The debriefing session took two hours, and although Spock was careful not to let it show, it was a traumatic experience, having to explain what had happened to Kirk in cold, hard facts. Afterwards he took himself off to the base hospital to satisfy himself that Kirk had settled.

There was no change in his condition, except that he looked even more lost and inert amongst the bustle of a busy medical unit. Spock sat at his bedside, and some strangely mixed-up emotion caused him to do what he very rarely did. He used his tactile senses, just touching the captain's hand lightly.

He did not expect a reaction, and was surprised when Kirk uncurled his tightly clenched fist and touched Spock's fingers in an exploratory

way. For two - perhaps three- seconds he clutched at them tightly, as though desperate for some kind of contact. Then he reverted back to insensibility.

Cold, hard logic instinctively took over. Planning his moves he returned to the Enterprise, now swarming with maintenance crews. Patiently, he worked his way through the official paper work, and by the time he had finished the Starship was on night status.

Quietly, he made his way to the main computer bank and keyed in two sequences. Within moments he had gained the information he required, realising that he knew very little of Captain James T. Kirk - at least, the background details. Like himself, he was a very private man.

The details safely stored in his mind for later use, he returned to his own quarters, for a while indulging in the memory of what had happened. It was important that he should remember in correct and logical sequence.

The planet landing : a cold, glittering world of snow and ice. The shocking thought-waves, terrible in their extreme, emanating from the pure-thought alien who controlled the planet. Even Spock had not been in full control of his own mind, and the awesome power of the alien probing deeply into the privacy of his thoughts had made him physically ill.

When the alien had finally gained control over the entire crew, it had bargained. Kirk's mind in exchange for the freedom of the Starship. Spock had also bargained : his mind instead of Kirk's. But the alien had refused. It needed Kirk... his intelligence, his dreams, and his aspirations. It required something else beside the horror of its own thoughts.

By then the crew were dying, unspeakable horror written onto their faces at the moment of tormented death. The lives of 400 in exchange for the intelligence of just one. Kirk was too great a man. He had beamed down alone to the ice-planet. When they found him two hours later the Enterprise was free, and he a mere shell. The alien had kept its word.

Spock had tried. Tried so hard to heal the blackness of his friend's mind that he had almost died in the attempt. McCoy, backed by a ruling from Starfleet Command, had forbidden further attempts. Up until now there was nothing to indicate life in Kirk except for the automatic working of his bodily functions. His heart beat strongly : he breathed : he took in nourishment : he excreted waste... if that could be called living. But today...

Spock looked down at his hand. He could almost feel that tight, desperate appeal for contact. Somewhere within that automated bodily shell was the vital spark of energy : of memory : of Kirk.

Quietly preparing himself, Spock placed himself into a meditational pose. Soon afterwards his surroundings faded as he withdrew into the deep and private recesses of his mind.

## 2.

As Spock had known he would be, McCoy was still in his quarters early the next morning, preparing for his departure. The doctor, no longer in uniform, but in light-coloured casuals so favoured by Terrans, looked more relaxed than he had done for weeks.

"Doctor, I apologise for the intrusion, but I must talk with you before you go. It's about Jim."

McCoy stopped what he was doing, and indicated his attentiveness.

"I require your help."

"Spock, what more can you do?... except kill yourself. The time you tried put you in sickbay for three days bereft of sanity. No! Jim is my friend too, but I cannot condone..."

"As you wish. I will manage without your assistance." Spock turned to leave. McCoy gently restrained him.

"Do you know how long it is since I last saw my daughter?...Okay, Spock, let's hear it. I guess Joanna can wait a while longer."

"Yesterday, there was a slight reaction. A physical contact with my hand."

"An improvement, sure, but nothing to shout 'Eureka!' over. I guess it proves there is minimal intelligence."

"Exactly. There was nothing before. Nothing but..." Spock paused, willing the awful memory away. "I require time, which I have. I also require isolation with Jim, and the authority to remove him from base hospital, which I do not have."

"No!...Okay, supposing I do get permission for him to be released. Where the hell would you go? It would be no pleasure trip. Jim may be a grown man, but he is also a very small child. His every need has to be attended to. Clothing, feeding, shaving, cleaning. That requires nursing and medical skills..." Dawning came. "Spock, you scheme too much! And you hit where it hurts! Supposing Joanna and I go along with your plans. Where would we go, exactly?"

"You have property, I believe, on the North American Continent."

"Oh sure, with my ex-wife installed therein! Sorry, Spock, but no way. We fight on sight, which wouldn't be good for me let alone Jim. I suppose you do have an alternative."

"Jim also has property on the same continent." That was nothing unusual. Most Starfleet officers invested in property.

"We break in, I suppose?" McCoy asked wryly. he was being remarkably obstinate.

"There is no need to force our way in. Jim employs a resident housekeeper."

The doctor heaved a huge sigh. "You'd make a great detective! How the hell do you know that?"

"All investments by Starfleet officers are, for security reasons, on record..."

"Aw, never mind. I don't like the idea, Spock. I don't like prying into Jim's private affairs, or what you intend to do. But I guess its better that I go along with you, than you go it alone with even worse consequences." He smiled wearily. "I guess you've not met my daughter?"

"No. I have never had cause to..."

"Then you'd best meet her now. See if she agrees to all this first. And I warn you, Spock, she's a lot like her old man!"

## 2.

Joanna McCoy was indeed like her father, at least outwardly : a blue-eyed brunette of about twenty Terran years.

Apart from his initial introduction to her, Spock chose to remain aloof. He was never very much at ease with any female at the best of times... and this was not one of them. At least she agreed... if only reluctantly... to assist, and he expressed due gratitude in the prescribed Terran manner.

Whilst McCoy set about his task of persuading the Starfleet Medical Authorities to release Kirk from base hospital, and Joanna contacted Kirk's housekeeper to warn her of their impending arrival, Spock went quietly about his own business. The Starbase was situated upon the

continent called Europa, and transportation had to be arranged. It was less than wise to involve Starfleet authorities more than was necessary.

He disliked all Starbase cities; ugly urbanity which had sprung up with the growth of speculators, in no planned order. Hotels, bars, amusement arcades, stores and dereliction, crammed into every conceivable place on either side of narrow highways : places where vice and crime inevitably and blatantly reared their ugly heads : the facade of bright lights hiding ugliness. Even the cosmopolitan crowds were distasteful in their excited pushiness. So unlike the quiet poise of his own people in their own beautiful cities.

Neither were the assistants at the Transcontinental booking offices particularly unhelpful. The conveyance of sick people, it seemed, was an unwelcome prospect... and expensive to prospective customers.

Spock did not argue, however. He did not mind about the cost, and gave his credit number willingly to the clerk, then waited patiently whilst the number was keyed into the computer. Seconds later the affirmative was given that the account was in balance, and he finally received the required documents.

When he returned to the rendezvous at Starbase HQ, McCoy had already secured Kirk's release from the base hospital. He had, he informed Spock, told some 'little white lies', but Spock did not inquire further. Untruths were unnecessary in any circumstances.

"You'll get me shot yet!" McCoy grumbled. "I still don't like this. What the hell happens if you get sick, Spock? What do I tell them at Starfleet if I bring back two sick senior officers?"

"Doctor McCoy, please do not speculate. If you do not wish to..."

"Spock, how many more times! It's dangerous. Jim would never expect you to risk your life for his. I do admire you for trying, really, and Jim is my friend too, but..." McCoy paused, searching Spock's face. "Dammit, do I have to spell it out? You are also my friend. How the hell would I feel if you ended up like... like THAT too? I'd never forgive myself. Never!"

"The responsibility is mine... And thank you for being my friend. Thank you for caring."

It was so rarely that Spock said 'thank you' in exactly that manner. McCoy realised the significance and simmered down, turning round on his daughter instead.

"What are you so amused about, Jo?"

"You two, I guess. Dad, you'll never change. And as for you..." Her blue eyes swept Spock's face intently. "You are exactly as I imagined you would be."

The next two hours were busy ones, culminating in the official release of Kirk into McCoy's care. He remained uncomprehending. Staring, but seeing nothing : a man with a small child's mind. Spock the Vulcan remained impassive. To all intents and purposes, a man without true feeling towards his friend and Captain. But the Human Spock felt very differently. He wanted to reach out, to say, "Jim, I care. I love you."

But as always, he failed; and the failure, as always, hurt him.

The journey to the vast linear city of Iowa on the North American continent of Terra was one which Spock would not have liked to repeat.

The four of them were given cramped but private accommodation at the rear of the hypersonic airliner, and although the flight took little over an hour, the journey upset Kirk badly despite McCoy's tranquilisers



and Joanna's expert nursing care. By the time they had reached the Iowa terminal, he was ill and restless. Because of McCoy's own forethought, there was a hover-ambulance awaiting them outside the terminal to take them to their final destination.

A gentle, moonlit darkness had fallen over the huge linear city of Iowa, giving a soft glow to the gridded structure of the wide highways and soaring overhead monorails. Most Terran cities were alike : long, thin arms stretching out onto the horizon for several hundred kilometers, yet a mere ten kilometers in width, giving easy access to often beautiful countryside beyond. It was difficult to imagine this, however, as they passed smoothly through each suburban sector, bounded by deeply shadowed parks. At the centre of each sector there was an impression of vibrant life from the pleasant, tree-lined walkways and gracious complexes of the community centres.

Spock had been to Terra just once before, and many years ago. But he had remembered the soft moonlight, for it had made a lasting impression on him.

Jim, too, had often spoken of it. But now, he just stared, seeing nothing but the blackness within his mind. Briefly, making sure that no-one else could see, Spock took his hand : said silently to him, "I will give you back your moonlight, Jim. If nothing else, I will give you that."

Beyond the narrow width of Iowa City the countryside was darkly shadowed either side of the well-lit highway. Eventually, they could see ahead of them a village community, nestling in a group of tall, ancient trees, and built in a semi-circle around its major amenities. Straggling beyond were a few substantial ranch-type dwellings, and it was into the drive of one of these that the hover finally pulled and came to a halt, when they were greeted - somewhat tearfully - by the housekeeper, who called herself Mrs. Anderson. She had, she informed them, known "The Captain" since boyhood, and was a lifelong friend of his mother.

Somehow, the place seemed typical of James T. Kirk, despite his years-long absences from it. Masculine, well-ordered, yet with just the right amount of dash and life in its decoration and style. Like all Terran homes, the sitting room was dominated by a whole-wall holograph which, had the situation been different, Spock would have liked to examine more closely; such 'entertainment' was rare on Vulcan.

McCoy was decidedly edgy, and whilst Joanna and Mrs. Anderson settled Kirk into bed, he paced.

"This isn't right, Spock! Hell, it's almost like trespassing! If Jim had wanted us here in his own private domain he would've invited us long ago. Can't you see how terrible it is, what we've done? A man's got a right to privacy, yet we come here like we owned the damned place. And as for you, poking around in matters that don't concern you! How would you like it if I suddenly decided to find out what you were worth..."

The culmination of events had certainly gotten to McCoy. Spock was careful not to allow his own irritation to show through.

"Doctor, you may... 'find out what I'm worth'... at any time, if you wish to discover how I would react. My own concern is to help Jim, nothing more. And although it is incidental now, I was invited here during our leave. The circumstances may have altered. The invitation has not been withdrawn to my certain knowledge."

McCoy said no more, and resorted to biting his lower lip, as though deciding on an uneasy truce, which lasted through a meal which no-one wanted, but which the McCoys ate out of Terran courtesy to Mrs. Anderson. Afterwards Joanna went off to feed Kirk, and Spock followed her shortly afterwards.

Kirk took the hi-cal mash automatically from the feeder : swallowed: took some more. Spock watched from the foot of the bed, aching, but not allowing his guard to drop for one moment. Joanna looked up at him and smiled.

"He's hungry after being so ill on the journey."

Spock did not care to watch any more. He turned away. Joanna put down the feeder and walked across to him.

"Mr. Spock, you love Jim Kirk, don't you? No, don't say that you do not recognise such emotion. I've been watching you. Your gestures, your expressions, the way you touch his hand and respond to his distress."

The inward pain increased. Outwardly he struggled to remain impassive.

"Miss McCoy..."

"Joanna. Please call me Joanna."

"...Joanna, I do not wish to be psychoanalysed. I appreciate what you are doing, but I prefer you to be less personal in your remarks, which have no factual basis, and are illogical."

She smiled again : her father's smile. "Please don't be embarrassed, Spock. I'm not trying to offend you."

"You do not offend me," Spock assured her, bringing the disconcerting conversation to a close. "Your patient... Joanna... has just rejected the food you recently gave him."

Quietly, with all the Vulcan dignity he could summon, he walked away, leaving Joanna to clear up the mess.

During the late and silent darkness of the night, Spock padded quietly across the hallway into Kirk's room. He was sleeping now : evenly, peacefully, an arm resting on the pillow, a stray lock of hair falling over his forehead.

Careful not to disturb him, Spock took his hand into his own, separated the fingers, and pressed them close to his own in the Vulcan manner of affectionate greeting.

He spoke to him in silence, the words from his heart which he would never be able to speak in reality. An eternity of silence...

Soft footsteps disturbed him. He whirled. The footsteps belonged to McCoy.

"I'm sorry, Spock. I didn't mean to disturb you. I guess I couldn't sleep either."

"No matter. I was ready to go anyway." Had McCoy seen his fingers pressed close to Kirks? Had the astute psychologist read his thoughts? He searched McCoy's face : relaxed somewhat.

"No matter," he repeated, almost absently, and looked back at the sleeping Kirk. "Eternity is forever..."

## 5.

Day's dawning, clear and bright across the countryside towards Iowa City. Spock calmly watched as the red orb of the sun rose up onto the horizon.

He was prepared. Now was the time : time to reach down into the dark depths of Kirk's destroyed mind. The two of them were isolated, upon his own instructions. The isolation of life... or death. Still calm, his breathing deep and even, Spock closed his eyes and placed his fingers onto Kirk's forehead, reaching... reaching...

Instantly he recoiled, stifling a scream of pain and horror. Trembling violently, the sweat beginning to bead onto his forehead, he stared down at the inert body of James Kirk. Ten minutes - fifteen. Gradually he composed himself again, until he felt able once more to try to reach Kirk's mind. He was prepared this time for the inevitable shock, and managed to cling tenaciously to the mind-touch.

He did not find Kirk's being, although he searched within the blankness. One hour... two hours... the awful, debilitating pressure of the mind-link was beginning to tell as his own bodily reserves plunged to an almost critical level. He tried his best to implant a seed of memory within the lost darkness of his friend's mind, but each time the seed was rejected. No memory... nothing... it almost seemed as though something was preventing him from achieving success... something...

Suddenly he know, wondering why he had not realised the fact before. The alien entity had not kept its word, and was using Kirk as its host. Such was its power that it was deliberately feeding weakness into Spock's own mind.

Weakened beyond recall, he broke off the mind-meld abruptly. He required strength, and knew he was unequal to the task, at least in the immediate future. Somehow he managed to stand shakily, opened the door and crossed the hall into his own room.

Six hours of meditation regained his inner strength, but before he could return to Kirk's room a knock sounded on his door and McCoy padded quietly inside.

"Spock, it's been nine hours. I was so concerned."

"Thank you, but I am unharmed."

"And Jim is no different. Spock, give it up! You tried, and no-one will condemn you for failing now. Please..."

"Doctor, I have not failed yet. I intend to try once more, now that I have replenished my energy," he insisted, careful not to divulge what he now knew to be the fact. He appreciated McCoy's concern, however. The doctor looked tired.

"It is you who should rest," he said, almost gently.

McCoy shook his head. "I can't rest! Not until this thing is ended one way or another. I'm worried about you and Jim... and now there's something else, too. An infection... unknown to me or the local doctor... in the community back there. Encephalitis, I'd call it, except we cannot trace the infection, which apparently began last night and has so far attacked three perfectly fit, healthy young men. We are now waiting for a neurologist to come here from Iowa City..."

Immediately Spock was attentive. He stood up, much strengthened by his recent meditation.

"Doctor McCoy, you will not require the services of a neurologist!"

"Spock!"

He did not answer. Within three strides he was beside Kirk's door...

This time there was a very different quality to his mind-link with Kirk, and he immediately realised why. THE ALIEN HAD GONE, and had left behind the utter wilderness of barren life... Not altogether sterile, however, for as he dipped ever deeper into the blackness he detected one single spark of energy : one entity : Kirk's deepest being, entrapped by the catastrophe which had overtaken him in the depths of space.

Slowly, painfully, Spock reached into the minute spark of energy.

"Jim, my mind is yours... use it... learn from it... lean upon its thoughts... gain strength..."

"SPOCK!" Kirk's scream was one of horror, panic : a desperate plea for help.

"Peace, Jim...Peace..."

"It has gone!... The entity which has devoured my mind. It has departed... joined the others which it brought here. I cannot endure... not within this crippled mind... Spock, HELP ME!"

Calmly, and ignoring the wild panic of Kirk's pleas, Spock withdrew from the small fragment of the Captain's mind. A single trace of alien thought remained. For a vital second, Spock clamped onto it, held to it tenaciously, and absorbed it into his own being...

## 6.

"You told us you were alone..."

"I spoke the truth. I multiplied within the rich resources of Kirk's thoughts."

"You have robbed Kirk of his entity..."

"My needs were greater. He has his body."

"Useless without his mind."

"Nevertheless, his body."

"Where are you now?"

"Awaiting the coming of my children..."

In the near distance thunder grumbled, and rain began to bespatter the driveway outside the house. Another sheet of lightning lit up the angry sky. As the following thunder crashed, this time almost directly overhead, a strange, eerie darkness fell over the village and the scattered homes in the nearby countryside.

"Spock, you can't go out in this!" McCoy told him reasonably, but Spock was already pulling on his jacket.

"The time is critical, Doctor. I must."

"But you're ill... look at you!..." McCoy sighed. "Okay, Spock, have it your own way. But if you must go out there and catch pneumonia, then I'm coming with you."

"Dad, no!" Joanna protested, flinching as another flash of lightning ripped across the sky. Her father put a gentle hand on her shoulder.

"Stay here, Jo. Look after Jim. Knowing Spock, we'll be back... eventually. Go now, Honey. Go see to Jim."

The rain was beating into their faces as they stepped into the driveway : a torrential downpour which soaked them through in a matter of seconds. Although it was midsummer, the temperature had plunged dramatically and Spock, despite both his thick jacket and an iron self-control, shivered uncontrollably.

In silence they reached the village, where the lights from the homes and community centre helped to light up the murky gloom. No-one but the two Enterprise men was about, and they passed through the main street without meeting anyone.

At the rear of the village there were two low, tree-lined hills, which formed a natural central valley, strewn dangerously with rocks. In the centre of the valley was a stream, which had already burst its

banks with the volume of water. McCoy cursed as he slipped on one of the rocks. Immediately ahead of them forked lightning split one of the ancient trees apart, and the two men just managed to jump clear in time as the huge branches crashed downwards, the noise competing with the gigantic clash of thunder. The rain pelted down harder.

"Spock, we must be crazy!" McCoy shouted above the elements. Spock did not answer. He knelt down on the sodden grass, holding his arms wide and up towards the angry sky.

"Your children are gathered around you now. I can feel their presence."

"We are united."

"You cannot dwell here. You will destroy the land with your powers, alien to this world. You will destroy the community below... the city beyond... the continent, the Earth, as you have destroyed Kirk and the other young men."

"We did not... do not... intend to destroy. Have you no conception of what it was like, to dwell for vast aeons in such black despair? I have taken what was my right. I have taken hope and love and beauty..."

"...And left your own black despair within the minds of four other beings. It is their right, too, to have hope, love and beauty."

"How else could I have achieved my freedom?"

"You could have asked, not taken, or bargained with many lives. We who live within a body have produced skills which are not available to you. Had you asked, instead of taken what was not rightfully yours, we could have given you all those things you longed for."

Another vivid flash of lightning lit up the surrounding countryside. From the hill directly to the left of them, a mass of sodden soil, loose shale and broken tree branches swept down towards the valley in a horrendous roar, missing them by centimetres as it slithered into the swollen waters of the stream.

"Hope and beauty are not founded upon destruction! Your force is too great! Soon, you will have nothing but a world destroyed by your own power!"

"What can we do? We have taken!"

"Ask. It shall be given. You have my word."

"Then we shall ask. What must we do? We cannot return to desolation..."

"Return from whence you came. To the planet which can withstand your powers. I will send the help that you require. You will be given those things within your own environment."

"How can we trust you?"

"I give my own life and Kirk's as surety. If assistance does not come, then you may take our thoughts."

A moment's pause... "The bargain is complete. Your minds for ours. We shall return to our planet and await your emissaries..."

"Spock, look out!"

Instantly Spock snapped out of his contact with the alien as a roaring wall of debris-choked water rushed towards them. Instinctively, he grabbed McCoy's arm and ran, almost dragging the older man after him.

Black water swirled menacingly around their ankles... rose swiftly to their knees. McCoy stumbled and fell into the eddies, and Spock plunged after him, dragging the half-drowned doctor up by the collar of his

jacket. Hoisting him onto his shoulder Spock half stumbled, half ran, until he was on firm ground, watching the mass of water gush past them, uprooting everything in its path until it finally spent itself harmlessly in the fields where at least only the soya crops were destroyed, not Human life.

McCoy stirred, retched, came to. Spock put him down to rest. The rain was lessening now, and the electrical storm had finished.

"Spock, what the hell were you doing back there?" McCoy demanded, struggling upright.

"Bargaining," he replied briefly. "Your Terran weather was indeed fortuitous, and so was my... er... inbuilt Terran capacity to lie."

"You, lie?"

"Doctor, how else could I have persuaded an alien being that it was destroying the entire planet by its mere presence here?... At least partly true, however. As it multiplied, it would have destroyed the minds of all Humanity. Come, let me help you..."

## 2.

James Kirk, still weak after his many weeks in bed, stood on the verandah of his house, looking out towards the horizon of Iowa City. Yesterday, in the midst of a violent thunderstorm, he had regained his mind and - although he did not understand why, just then - had found himself in bed, in his own house, being looked after by a very young, very pretty female McCoy. It had been some time later that everything had been explained to him.

But today, strength was returning to his weakened muscles. It felt good to have the warm sun beating down onto his bronzing arms : even better to be at home. Tomorrow, he thought, I will go and see my Mom, but today I guess I'll just relax.

There were footsteps behind him. McCoy and his daughter stood there, smiling identical smiles.

"Hi there! How are your patients in the village, Bones?"

"Recovered fully, thank goodness. This time - at least so far - the alien has kept his word."

"Well, Spock is with the Starfleet authorities right now. By tonight there'll be a team of psychologists on its way to the planet, so Spock's part of the bargain will be complete." He grinned - especially at Joanna, whom he found immensely attractive. "You'll be staying here... for the rest of your leave? There's plenty to do around here - riding, fishing... even a little hunting..."

"Jim, we'd love to, but... well, I guess the truth is, Jo and I have got a lot to catch up on."

He tried not to feel disappointed. "Sure, I understand. Spock will be back tonight, so I shouldn't feel too lonely. Thanks anyway, Bones... Joanna... for all you've done."

They departed soon afterwards. It was nightfall when Spock finally returned, and Kirk was alone, Mrs. Anderson having gone into the city, not being able to wait until tomorrow to tell Kirk's mother that he would be over to see her.

Spock looked weary, and Kirk insisted that he sit down while he prepared a meal of sorts, and a drink.

"How did it go, Spock?" he asked when they eventually settled.

"Well. There is a ship on its way to the alien's planet."



JUST AN ORDINARY DAY.

The computer alarm impinged onto Kirk's pleasant world of sleep. Turning, half awake, he shot out his hand and switched it off. Five minutes later it buzzed again, and this time he could not ignore it. Resignedly climbing out of bed, he switched it off again with a definite feeling of hatred towards it, then made his way towards the john and shower in that order. Still barely awake, he luxuriated in the fierce spray of hot water for a good five minutes before he felt willing and able to face the day.

Spock was shaving as he stepped dripping from the shower and stood himself under the dryer.

"Good morning, sir." Kirk always marvelled at the way Spock greeted his nude captain each morning like he was in full dress uniform.

"Huh? Is it... I mean, good morning, Spock." He yawned, praying his daily prayer that one day soon Starship captains would be allocated their very own private bathroom. Not that he minded sharing with Spock. It was just that he was so darned lively at 0700 hours every morning.

With a mumbled "See you at breakfast," Kirk shuffled back into his quarters.

Damned mess... So tired last night... Clean underwear and socks, Jim! ... Why do I always think THAT in my mother's voice?... Where the hell...?

By a process of curses and shufflings Kirk dressed and plodded down to the officers' mess. Coffee! Life-sustaining coffee!

"What in heaven would we do without it?"

"Sir?" queried Spock, sipping tea.

"Nothing," said Kirk, wondering if his first officer ever heard his mother's voice telling him to change his underwear and socks. He saw Scotty bearing down on him.

"Captain, ye've no' forgotten the Departmental meeting in engineering at 1000 hours, have ye?"

He had. "No Scotty, I'll be there." Damn! And all that paperwork! "Can't you go, Spock?" he asked, delegating.

"No, sir. I have my own departmental meeting at the same time."

So much for delegation! All those meetings! All that bureaucratic paper work! Where were the new worlds and new civilisations he had joined Starfleet to find? Lost beneath a shower of pro-forma. He snatched another cup of coffee from the machine just as McCoy joined them, a cheerful grin on his face.

"Hi Jim, Spock. Captain, you look decidedly crusty this morning."

"Huh?"

"Don't forget your meeting with me at 0900 hours."

"ANOTHER ONE??"

Spock prudently spoke up. "Sir, we are on duty in precisely three minutes, ten seconds time."

Kirk drained his coffee cup, put it into the recycler, and stood up.

"I'll be there, Spock. Just a quick visit to the john..."

Spock looked at him directly, without a trace of amusement in his eyes. "Captain Kirk, might I suggest that a little less coffee would be advisable?"

McCoy broke up. Kirk broke up, but not with laughter, and he marched away with what he hoped was perfect dignity.



On the bridge all was quiet, except that Sulu, the duty officer for the watch just ending, was relating a slightly smutty story to Lieutenant Riley. When he saw his senior officers his voice trailed off, and the bridge crew snapped smartly to attention... well, smart-ISH. Sulu was slightly pink around the ears, Riley almost bursting with laughter, young Johnson trying to brush edible crumbs of some sort from Spock's console, and Uhura doing her damndest to look like she never listened to slightly smutty stories anyway.

"Anything to report, Lieutenant?" Kirk asked, easing himself into the con, recently vacated by Sulu and still warm.

"No, sir. Quiet night."

"Time to spare for telling jokes, huh?"

"Sir?"

"Never mind, Mr. Sulu. Dismiss."

As Sulu went clattering away, Kirk snapped on the personal viewer for a read-out of the status report. Not a single new world; not one new civilisation. Just empty space, meetings and paper work... Almost idly, he read the incoming status reports from the rest of the ship.

"Lieutenant Uhura, why are you hovering?"

"I'm not, Captain!"

"Well, you're not opening hailing frequencies."

"There's none to open." Uhura sounded quite forlorn.

Hmm. Know how she feels. And talking of hailing... "I haven't seen Ensign Chekov this morning."

"He's taking his second grade command exam, sir," ventured Riley.

Poor kid! But he'd make out. The education officer always gave him such glowing reports.

"Mr. Johnson, shouldn't you be in class today?"

"Education Officer Parry gave us time off, sir. Chekov's exam and all..." He beamed a self-satisfied beam.

"Then go do some studying in the lecture room, Ensign."

The beam faded. Johnson stomped away. If he skived, Kirk thought, it would be on his own shoulders at a later date...

Damned empty space!... What the hell was Spock looking in his viewer with such rapt attention for? There was nothing to see. He started to hum tunelessly through his teeth. That always irritated the first officer. Hum... hum... Spock turned, duly irritated, and Kirk stood up.

"I'm going to sickbay. Take the con, Mr. Spock."

"Are you ill?"

"No, but I may be out of my mind before today is out," he warned wryly. "I'm off to the first of my meetings early. May get some coffee down there, it's certainly not forthcoming here."

He padded away before Spock decided to put in a parting shot. And if McCoy dares to tell me I'm early...

"Hi, Jim. You're early!"

Grrrrr!

"Gotta lotta paper work to do, Bones, and I'm due in engineering in little over an hour, so make it snappy, huh?"

"You ARE crusty! It's about time you had a rest."

"Bones!" Kirk warned. A rest was the last thing he wanted. Good honest action, that was the remedy. Maybe a warm-up in the gym.

McCoy, grinning, handed the quarterly-return tapes over to him, all sealed ready for delivery to Starfleet HQ.

"It's been so damn quiet around here, Jim. Got all the medicals done, plus the recurrent vaccination programme. Even the contraception rota is almost complete. I'm just two short of that. One isn't likely to need it anyway for another five years, and the other..." McCoy's blue eyes looked at him accusingly.

"It's an infringement on personal liberty!" Kirk hedged.

"Better than having sickbay full of weepy girls awaiting termination. Roll your sleeve up, I'll do it now. Strike while the iron's hot, as it were."

Kirk sighed, but rolled up his sleeve anyway, and watched McCoy tape the wafer-thin membrane onto his upper arm. It would be absorbed in a couple of hours time.

"It isn't necessary!" He felt like grumbling this morning.

"Oh yeah?" McCoy drawled like he didn't believe him. Kirk stood up and rolled his sleeve down.

"Opportunity, Bones, would be a fine thing, and right now I have no opportunities to look forward to," he said as he made his way towards the elevator complete with tapes he didn't really want and contraception he had no use for.

"And tell Spock I want him! I want my records straight!"

The elevator doors closed around him. That, he thought, was a job McCoy would have to do for himself.

### 3.

McCoy settled himself in front of his own mound of paper work. For a time at least all was quiet in sickbay. John M'Benga was dealing with the trickle of patients at morning surgery... the usual crop of aches and pains which were always more prolific when there was not much doing.

He paused, then did what he did every morning before starting work in earnest. He dived into the top drawer of his desk and pulled out an interstellar letter.

"Dearest Dad..."

God, he could almost hear her voice! Aching, he put the letter away and began his assault on officialdom.

Half an hour later the emergency buzzer went off, making him jump. He hit the intercom button.

"McCoy here."

"Medic team requested in engineering. Emergency."

"Be right over. McCoy out."

When McCoy and the medic team arrived in engineering, a group of people were clustered round the body of a young girl, including one very distressed ensign.

"Julie! Julie, it was an accident... all an accid..."

McCoy swept everyone aside and bent down beside the girl. Even without the aid of the medical tricorder it was obvious that she was badly injured. She was about twenty, with wide, frightened, pain-filled eyes. No older than Jo...

"All right, Honey, rest easy now," he crooned soothingly, assuring himself that there was no head injury before he gave her a shot of analgesic. Beside him, the ensign was near to hysteria. "Someone get him the hell away from here!" he ordered curtly. "Take him to sickbay." He turned back to the girl. Internal injuries. Multiple fractures of the left leg and arm. No damn older than Jo....!

"Doctor, it was an accident."

"Sure, Honey, don't you worry about a thing. We'll get you to sickbay. Make you comfortable."

With the help of two medics he put temporary splints onto the fractured limbs, then gave orders for her to be taken to sickbay. He straightened up and turned to Scotty.

"How did it happen?"

The chief engineer was clearly distressed. Now wasn't the time to discuss the accident. He put a hand on Scotty's shoulder.

"Okay, Scotty, later. Go get yourself a cup of strong coffee."

"She'll make it?"

"I'm not sure. Wait until she's been to surgery, then I'll let you know."

He emerged from surgery two hours later, tired and feeling completely drained. The girl would make it, and at least that gave him some satisfaction. He stayed with her until she had been safely attached to life-support, then crawled into his office and flopped down, thankful for the coffee that Christine brought to him. He was still drinking it when both Kirk and Scott arrived. Patiently, he explained to them, and everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

"What happened, Scotty?"

"The little fools were working up on the gantry. The laddie unhooked the safety belt to get a better angle on what they were working with, and..."

"How many times do they have to be told about safety precautions!" McCoy groaned. "Half the trauma we get in here is due to sheer, goddamned carelessness."

Kirk stood up. "Then it's about time we re-inforced that fact into their thick skulls. I want a meeting with all department heads in the briefing room at 1400 hours, sharp!"

#### 4.

Kirk returned to the bridge with Spock in decidedly worse humour than before. It should not have been necessary to have called such a meeting in the first place. Safety factors were inbuilt into the system, and it was the prerogative of no-one, from the captain down, to ignore them. He felt the first twinge of headache. The crew had been inactive for too long, and he decided that an emergency drill was in order. But tomorrow. That damned headache... Almost as though she had divined his need, Uhura appeared with coffee and, ignoring Spock's upswep eyebrow, he drained the cup thankfully in two gulps. Almost without realising he was doing it, he resumed his tuneless humming.

"Captain, is that any particular tune?" Spock asked loftily.

"No, just a hum."

Spock had made his point, and turned back to his work. Kirk stopped humming, and Uhura tried her best to pretend she wasn't grinning. Five minutes later, Spock swivelled again. He was probably the most active guy on the whole ship, Kirk thought.

"Sir, I have a reading at 9.234 degrees starboard."

A new civilisation? Even the Klingons would be welcome! Spock transferred to the big screen. Not even a Klingon. Trading vessel, registration number F40768. Spock punched out a computer reference.

"Bona fide trader, Captain. Registration confirmed."

"Asking permission to come alongside, Captain," Uhura informed him.

"Tell him no, Uhura."

"Oh, but sir! We've not even sniffed at a starbase or trader for weeks. And today IS payday..."

Payday! Alarm bells ringing madly.

"Spock, are you taking pay parade?"

"No, Captain..."

"Sir!" Uhura's pleading voice.

"YES?"

"Thanks, sir!"

"Lieutenant-Commander Kyle is in charge of pay parade duties, sir."

Cancel panic button!... "Uhura, what the hell are you doing?"

"Giving the trader permission to come alongside."

"WHAT?"

"You did say yes, Captain."

"I didn't say yes! I said, Yes?...aw, never mind! Mr. Spock, take the con for a few minutes!"

"Where are you going, sir?"

"To... to the john, Mr. Spock!"

Spock never said a word. He didn't have to. His climbing eyebrow said it for him. AGAIN, sir?

## 5.

Kirk gave a disgusted glance at his pay-chit, paying particular attention to the tax-deduction column, then tucked it into his belt. In front of him at the navigation console, Mr. Riley was grumbling bitterly to Johnson.

"Take a look at that! Sure, they give it to you with one hand and take it..."

"Mr. Riley, if you're going to grouse for the rest of the day, at least have the courtesy to let us all know why."

Riley went pink up to his ears. "Sir, it's diabolical. All this tax..."

"Think yourself lucky you get away so lightly, Lieutenant! All we have to pay is Federation tax. People like Mr. Spock have to pay home tax too."

Riley mumbled something like : "Mr. Spock can afford to, he's loaded anyway."

"What was that, Mister?"

"Just commiserating with Mr. Spock, sir," Riley said blithely.

Spock opened his mouth to put in a lofty comment of his own, and Kirk decided to take his undoubtedly wealthy first officer away from the atmosphere on the bridge.

"Uhura, has the trader come alongside yet?"

"Yes, sir. All ready to receive paying guests," she answered brightly. Kirk stood up.

"Not yet. Mr. Spock, come with me please. I want to check her out first. Lieutenant Uhura, the con, please."

The trader, like all such vessels, was small, cramped, and overstocked with goods which, in general, everyone could have done without but usually fought over to get. She was in the charge of a plump, greasy little man with grasping, podgy fingers and an oversized gut. A young, sulky and seedy brunette sat in one corner of the "Store", eyeing the two Enterprise men with sultry indifference.

"Who's the girl?" Kirk demanded sharply.

"My daughter, Captain." Obviously the little man was used to prying Starship captains... and Kirk was quite used to podgy little men in charge of trading vessels.

"You can go tell that to the Klingons!" he snapped. "And you needn't try to sell her undoubted charms to my crew, either. Has she been checked medically recently?" The trader hedged, and Kirk flicked open his communicator. "Kirk to sickbay. I have a nice little routine job for some lucky doctor aboard the trader."

McCoy's weary voice answered. "Sure, Captain. Be right over."

The rest of the goods seemed to check out okay. At least there were no tribbles being harboured on the heavily-laden shelves of glow water, Rigellian jewellery and other such delights. McCoy arrived with a nurse, and took the girl into a back room, whilst Spock read an abridged version of regulations to the trader. At the last sentence his voice uncharacteristically faltered. Kirk did not need to be told why.

He picked up the IDIC from the counter. "Where did you get this?"

"Nice, isn't it? Thirty credits..."

Spock almost choked. "Do you know what this is?" Kirk demanded.

"Sure, something to do with his planet. To him, twenty."

Spock tensed. Kirk stepped between Vulcan and trader. "If I were you, Mister, I would be very anxious about the preservation of my neck. This is an IDIC, the most revered symbol on Vulcan, and you know as well as I do that it is against trading regulations to sell for profit or other gain anything likely to give offence..."

The guy capitulated. Thirty credits... much less twenty... was just not worth the loss of his licence. He gave the IDIC to Spock like he was giving him the whole of his stock.

"Didn't mean no offence, Mister, honest. Didn't know..."

McCoy and the nurse emerged from the back room, the girl in tow, a smug look on her face.

"She's clean, Jim... medically speaking, at least." The doctor slapped a regulation medical certificate onto the counter. "Ten credits," he demanded.

"Ten credits? For three minutes' work?"

"Ten credits. I'm a doctor, not a charity organisation. You chose to have her aboard, so you can pay the bills."

McCoy got his ten credits. He was still grinning broadly when they all stepped off the transporter pad on the Enterprise. Spock was clearly shocked.

"Doctor, is it quite ethical to charge for your services?"

"Nope, guess not. Fortunately the days when patients actually had to pay to visit the doctor are long since gone."

"Then why...?"

"I did not charge the patient, Spock. I did not charge for my medical services, either."

"Then what exactly did you charge ten credits for, doctor?"

McCoy was still grinning, like the cat with the cream. "Well, I had to put my signature on the medical certificate, didn't I?" He tossed the ten-credit piece into the air, caught it, and went off muttering to his nurse that it would help to swell the funds for the sickbay party at Christmas.

## 6.

Off duty at last! Kirk relaxed in the rec room, wondering why he always felt so much more tired when he hadn't really done anything... well, discounting paper work, meetings, the engineering emergency, a lecture to department heads about safety, and that crazy trader, fortunately now gone and probably several hundred credits better off than when he arrived.

And now, he was at a loose end, as usual. Rolling up his sleeve he tugged off the now redundant tape disgustedly. What a waste! Spock came in, helping himself to tea from the machine.

"Fancy a game of chess, Spock?"

"I am otherwise engaged, Captain."

"Oh?" That sounded unlikely.

"The music group are holding a recital of Grieg's..."

Kirk didn't really hear the rest. Even Spock had his own damn hobbies and interests. Grieg who? He suddenly felt spiteful.

"Did McCoy get hold of you today, Spock?"

"What for, in particular?"

Kirk looked resentfully at his arm. "To render you safe to young girls."

Spock did not appreciate that. Kirk had not expected him to, and wasn't surprised when Spock downed his tea and went off to his Grieg recital. He looked around. There must be someone to spend an evening with. Scotty! He collared the engineer and cornered him like a praying mantis.

"Got time for a drink, Scotty? I've got some excellent, very old, very rare..."

Scotty was already shaking his head. "Captain, you know there's a football match on tonight."

"Can't you give it a miss?" Kirk hated soccer, and could never see why the majority of his crew got so worked up about it. Scotty drew himself up to his not inconsiderable height.

"I'm the referee, Jim. No ref, no game." Scotty grinned. "A Scotsman loves three things. His country, his whisky, and his football. All three come first some time in his life. Right now, it's football. Why don't you watch the match? I've been training the Enterprise Kop choir."

"The WHAT?" That sounded worse than a Grieg recital. Hell, never mind! Out of the corner of his eye he saw McCoy, and with him the last chance of a companionable evening slipping swiftly away. The doctor,

oozing with Southern charm, had a rather beautiful female attached very firmly to his arm.

Angry... with himself rather than with his immediate friends... he stomped off reluctantly to his own quarters. For a couple of hours he caught up with some more paper work, switched on the viewer for a very brief look at how the soccer match was going, then settled down with a none-too-interesting book which he had read twice anyway.

He must have fallen asleep. When his buzzer sounded the Enterprise was on night status, and it was very late. Rousing himself, he opened the door. Spock stood there, politely waiting to be invited in, dressed in his usual casual denims.

"Jim, I was concerned about you. You were edgy this evening."

Bless you, Spock! Someone cares! He grinned, inviting the first officer inside. If Spock saw his intense eagerness, then he did not comment.

"Drink?"

"I prefer my own. The chess game we started three days ago, Jim. Shall we continue now?"

Kirk settled himself comfortably into Spock's quarters, relaxing. Before him the board was already set out, and Spock was pouring drinks. Kirk stretched, and made his first move.

"What a day!" he commented, almost to himself.

Spock handed him a slender glass of bright green liquid. "Just an ordinary day," the Vulcan corrected him gently.

Yeah, just an ordinary day... Maybe tomorrow there'll be the new worlds and new civilisations...

Maybe tomorrow.....

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